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The Impact of Hope in the Dissertation Process: Perceptions of Doctoral Students

By

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To my nephew Chauncy,
don't be afraid to dream big!

Abstract

This study examines the doctoral dissertation experience through the lens of graduate student hope. While hope has become a mainstay in health research, the role of hope in education has received less attention. This study examines hope from a graduate student's perspective offering new understandings of hope in the complex educational context. In particular, the aim of this study is to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-fostering" and "hope-threatening" interactions as experienced by doctoral students when working on their doctoral dissertation.

Participants in this study include eight individuals who successfully completed their doctoral dissertations from applied programs in Canada. The method of inquiry for this study is the critical incident technique, and participants were asked to reflect upon their entire dissertation process for significant hope-impacting moments that occurred within the context of their relationships with others.

The findings describe the experiences solely from the perspective of the participants. Two hope-fostering themes, "Alliance," and "Responsiveness to Students' Needs," and one hope-threatening theme "Non-Responsiveness", emerged from the interview data. A number of important sub-themes contribute to these primary themes. The findings of this study suggest that for the participants, hope played an important role in the dissertation process. Participants share experiences revealing that attending to and nurturing hope in the doctoral student facilitates the dissertation process. Furthermore, the findings support the belief that doctoral students' hope is nurtured within the context of their relationships with others, and that peers, family, and friends all have a role in fostering hope; however, the supervisory relationship is viewed as a key relationship. In

keeping with the vital impact of the supervisory relationship, supervisors, along with many others were named as sources of hope; however; it was the supervisory relationship alone that was identified as a potential threat to student hope during the dissertation process.

This study demonstrates that relationships can have a profound impact on student hope and the dissertation process suggesting that those in relationship with doctoral students can be deliberate in their attempts to foster hope. Hope-fostering suggestions are provided for doctoral students, supervisors, and university departments.

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CHAPTER ONE

My Story

The experience of hope during the dissertation process is not only the story of my participants; it is my story, too. To place my research focus in context, I begin with my own account of hope in the dissertation process.

As I see it, my story has two chapters. In my mind, there is a clear line that separates these two parts of my dissertation story. I was accepted into the PhD program over six years ago, and having not yet fully completed all of the requirements of the Master's program (i.e., thesis), I entered the doctoral program with tempered enthusiasm, knowing that attempting to finish one degree while simultaneously meeting the extensive requirements of another was going to be a challenge – and it was. What I had learned from my Master's experience was that I did not enjoy writing, in fact, the thought of writing a doctoral dissertation in no way appealed to me. I did know however, that the dissertation was a part of the doctoral program. If I were to be successful, I would need to complete all aspects of the program, including the dissertation. Despite my lack of enthusiasm with respect to writing a dissertation, I did have a strong interest in conducting a study that would have practical application to a particular client population. I had hoped that my doctoral research could help inform and influence the work my colleagues and I did on a day-to-day basis. I began working on my first research study over four years ago, and as I discuss later, I encountered multiple hurdles along the way. As a result of these hurdles, and in consultation with my supervisor, I decided to change research topics. I spent approximately two years working on my first study before deciding to change topics.

I began to work on this current research study about two years ago. What also occurred around that time was a change in supervisors. My initial supervisor had retired almost one year earlier, but thankfully, she had agreed to continue to supervise me until such time that we could find another supervisor to take her place. This shift in my research topic and change in supervision is what separates the two parts of my story.

I told my first story, in a research interview, to a friend and colleague prior to conducting the interviews for this dissertation. At that time, I reflected back on the hope-threatening and hope-engendering moments that I had so far experienced. As I reflected on the interview transcript that was generated, I realized that by sharing my story I had unwittingly created an ethical dilemma. How much of my story can I safely share with others? My choices were to tell my entire story and as a result likely identify the parties involved or to limit the details of my experiences so as to protect others. Although I wanted very much to honour my experiences by honestly sharing the details with others, on some level, I knew that I could not. Ultimately, I decided not to include the details of my hope-threatening moments so as to not identify those involved. I understand that because I have made this choice, readers may feel as though they have only a superficial understanding of my overall experience. Readers may also be left feeling frustrated by the lack of detail that I can provide. I share this frustration.

Overall, my hope was threatened during times where individuals in positions of power placed seemingly unnecessary roadblocks in front of me. Hurdles that I was expected to jump if I were to continue with my dissertation. It was not the hurdles in and of themselves that were the problem – I have been a student for a long time and have certainly grown very skilled at jumping hurdles with little difficulty. For me, the issue

really was that these hurdles appeared impossible to jump – for anyone. They seemed impossible to overcome because they did not make sense. I remember this happening twice for me. The first time it happened I was angry. I was frustrated. I felt like my project had been unnecessarily delayed. I wanted to finish in such a bad way and during this time, which seemed to go on for weeks, if not months, I never did lose sight of my goal of finishing. The internal drive to finish was palpable. The problem was - how do I? I didn't know what to do or where to turn. I was lucky because I had a supervisor who helped me. She provided me with sound advice – a solution to the problem that I was faced with. I thank her for that. When I was lost, she showed me the way. I was bruised but not beaten – with the support and guidance from my supervisor, I persevered.

The second time that I encountered a hurdle the result was different. This time, rather than slowing down the project – it came to a sudden and unexpected end. This was a hurdle that I could not jump – I could not address the questions that were being asked of me because there were no answers. Anger isn't the right word to describe this experience - I was too tired for anger. I had to make a decision. Do I fight to continue or do I start over? Do I keep going or do I call it quits? Is it worth it? Having had a similar experience earlier in the process, I knew that I didn't have the energy or time to devote to fighting to keep the project alive. I decided to let it die – at least for the time being. I didn't make that decision alone. Again, my supervisor was there to guide me. She helped give voice to what I was feeling and experiencing. Ultimately, she let it be my decision but was explicitly clear that she would support what I felt I needed to do. Not only did she offer me support when I decided to let the project die, she was the first person to engage me in a discussion about my new topic – this topic. She didn't let me stay stuck in self-pity and

despair. She gently moved me beyond, encouraging me to find something else that I could feel passionate about. For that, I will be forever grateful.

My hope was tested during these difficult moments. However, it was *because* of these moments that I became aware of my hope. Having lived through these experiences I became aware of how hope played an important part in my life and in my dedication to obtaining my educational goals. Years earlier, I had moved to Edmonton for no other reason than to obtain my PhD, and I was not leaving Edmonton without it. Rather than fostering hope, the hurdles that I faced threatened it and tested the promise that I had made to myself many years ago. Two people were important here. The first was my supervisor, who was always there to help me pick up the pieces when it felt like everything was falling apart. She knew that I would finish – even if it meant that I would start over. The second relationship is the one I have with my family with my mother as their spokesperson. My family was a great source of hope for me, always, but especially as it related to my education. I knew that they were rooting for me to succeed. They were my cheerleaders. I drew upon their strength. Their prayers, I'm sure, helped too! I am the first in my immediate family to receive a university education and it is my goal alone; however, I wanted to succeed for them as much as I did myself. I needed only to remember them and I was motivated to continue. I certainly drew upon their strength and support when I encountered these difficulties.

The second chapter of my dissertation story had a different flavour – in this chapter, my hope was *never* threatened by encounters with others. What distinguishes this chapter from the first is that I had *only* interactions that fostered my hope. The

experiences of adversity that defined my experience early on were noticeably absent in this chapter.

The second chapter of my dissertation story began with a new topic and a new supervisor. I chose this topic as a direct result of the personal experiences that I had had in the doctoral program. At the same time that I was developing my new proposal, I also changed supervisors. Sometimes, I have heard, changing supervisors can be a hope-threatening experience. Luckily, this was not my experience. I believe that the transition was a smooth one, done with great care and consideration for my needs. Although my past and current supervisors' styles may differ, their ability to inspire hope in me was very similar. I still left the supervisor's office feeling like I could conquer the world. I still left the office with confidence in me and in my abilities to be successful.

The hope story that I could not tell prior to starting this research is one that I can tell now. I designed a new study that I believe was ideal for fostering and sustaining hope. Throughout the process, I met eight people who, by sharing their stories with me, fostered hope in me. While working on this project, I *knew* that completing a dissertation was possible – because I saw it. In listening to their stories, I came to learn that my experiences were not unique – that I was not alone. I was told stories of success and was energized by them. I was told stories of perseverance and they motivated me. These hopeful feelings resurfaced each and every time I read the transcripts, worked on analyzing the date or writing up the information. Even if I wanted to, there was no escaping hope! Reflecting on this experience I feel grateful to those who shared their stories with me. I am also grateful to those who allowed me to pursue this topic.

This is but part of my account of hope in the dissertation process. The experience of writing a dissertation about hope offered new opportunities and invitations to experience my own hope. I will share reflections on these experiences in a discussion of my research findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

Obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) is a large undertaking. If students are to be successful in their pursuit of a doctoral degree, they must complete several requirements. Although there are some differences between the various disciplines and/or institutions, the basic requirements include "(1) specialized courses with a minimum residency of one year and at least two or three years of doctoral enrolment, (2) a qualifying or comprehensive examination, (3) a dissertation of original research and (4) a public, oral defense of this research" (Elgar, 2003, p. 2). These aforementioned requirements are those needed to obtain a PhD and do not take into account the years of education and experiences necessary prior to enrolment in a doctoral program.

Those who choose to commit themselves to meet the requirements of a doctoral education are embarking upon a difficult journey. In recognition of the challenge of doctoral work, and in an effort to support students, authors have written numerous books (e.g., Dunleavy, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 1998; Glatthorn, 1997; Roberts, 2004) and journal articles (e.g., Kuhlenschmidt, 1992) with the aim of preparing doctoral students for the hurdles ahead. Further, support groups have been developed to assist doctoral students who are experiencing emotional and/or psychological difficulties with respect to their role as graduate students (e.g., Inman & Silverstein, 2003; Johnson & Conyers, 2001).

Individuals who decide to pursue a PhD are a relatively small and arguably a unique subset of the general population. It can be argued that individuals who pursue a PhD are ambitious and/or career oriented. Students can be expected to dedicate several years in the pursuit of their goals. Cude (2001) reports that no definitive statistics exist on

the length of time required to complete a program, however, he maintains that the number of years required to complete a doctoral degree has been growing steadily making the task of obtaining a doctoral degree even more arduous.

With the lack of clear statistics, researchers are thus limited to reporting on time-to-complete estimates. Frank Elgar (2003) completed one such report. Elgar, citing a 1997 study by the Graduate Student Association (GSA) of Canada, reports that, most PhDs in Canada "are conferred after 7 to 9 years of study after the bachelor's degree" (p. 4). Elgar qualifies this estimate by stating that it does not account for temporary leaves of absences, which, if they were accounted for, would extend the required time needed to complete the degree by two to three years.

Pursuing a PhD requires a large investment of time and resources, from the student, his or her advisor(s), and the university department. Each of these stakeholders has a vested interest in ensuring the successful outcome of this academic endeavour. For the student, completion of the degree can be both personally and professionally rewarding. For the advisor(s), his or her professional standing can be enhanced by the success of his or her student, for example, through joint submissions for publications and/or involvement in conferences. Finally, the reputation and funding of the university department can be improved if a greater number of doctoral students successfully complete their program requirements.

The road to obtaining a PhD can be a difficult and agonizing one. For example, graduate students report feelings of isolation (Inman & Silverstein, 2003; Johnson & Conyers, 2001) burnout and stress (Inman & Silverstein, 2003) demands of conflicting responsibilities (Rode, 1999) financial problems (Hudson & O'Regan, 1994; Moyer &

Salovey, 1999) and difficulties or differences with their advisor or supervisory committee (Faghihi, 1998; Inman & Silverstein, 2003; Lenz, 1995). Furthermore, attendance in graduate school has been shown to negatively impact marriages and to be associated with a higher risk of divorce (Scheinkman, 1988). Within marriages, areas of concerns that have been identified include, "…financial issues, lack of leisure time and recreational pursuits, role conflicts, and restricted social life" (McLaughlin, 1985, p.489). Completing the degree, in spite of these various obstacles, can serve to enhance students' sense of satisfaction with their success. Unfortunately, despite the time invested and potential benefits of successful completion, a large number of students do not complete the degree. Elgar (2003), citing the 1997 study by the GSA of Canada, indicates that the completion rates vary greatly by discipline. For example, less than half of all students (44.7% and 48.5%) in the arts and humanities and social sciences, respectively, successfully complete their degrees. The success rates in the natural and applied sciences and life sciences are higher, at 66.7% and 70.4%, respectively. Elgar qualifies these estimates by arguing that, "they are quite likely an *overestimate* of completion rates in thesis-based PhD programs" (p. 6). Elgar maintains that the actual completion rates ranged from 39.6% (English) to 82.8% (biochemistry).

Elgar (2003) argues that the demand for PhD trained professionals continues to grow and that "there is an urgent need for optimal retention of PhD students such that the majority of students who enter programs succeed in completing the degree" (p. 4). Upon completion of his study, Elgar put forth several recommendations to "describe future directions for higher education research and for improved administration of PhD programs in Canada" (p. 23). Included in this set of recommendations are suggestions for

the development of a national database which would hold information related to completion and time-to-complete rates, improvements in funding, establishment of guidelines for students and supervisors, enhanced program structure, and greater support services for students and supervisors. With respect to the last recommendation, Elgar argues that:

> Addressing the problems of financial support, supervision, and educational structure are all necessary, but not sufficient, to deal with thesis completion difficulties.... The responsibility of universities to aim to meet the social and emotional needs of graduate students is no less significant than the provision of funding and supervision (p. 27).

Elgar maintains that university administrations have a responsibility to look to develop cost-efficient strategies that will serve both to enhance the quality of the educational experience, as well as the likelihood that students will achieve success in their academic endeavours.

University administrators must not ignore the psychological needs of doctoral students. It is imperative that steps be taken to minimize the impact of the internal factors that can impede the success of graduate students. Because hope helps us cope with stress (Irving, Snyder, & Crowson, 1998; Notwotny, 1989) and gives us the sustaining energy that we need to reach our goals (Snyder, 1995; Snyder, Ilardi, Cheavens, Michael, Yamhure, & Sympson, 2000), one such method of caring for the psychological needs of doctoral students may be to focus on enhancing the hope of students.

As is shown in the literature, hope arises from adversity (Benzein, Norberg, & Saveman, 2001; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Dufrane & LeClair, 1984; Haase, Britt,

Coward, Leidy, & Penn, 1992; Herth, 1998; McGee, 1984; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Nowotny, 1989) and as Dufault and Martocchio (1985) explain, "hoping processes are stimulated…[when]…individuals attempt to change situations or to rise above their influences" (p. 383). For doctoral students, hope may play a crucial role in continuing to pursue their education, despite the difficulties they must endure to meet this goal. Supporting this assertion is research that demonstrates that hope is associated with a greater successful goal attainment, despite the existence of external barriers to these goals (Snyder, 1995; Snyder, et al., 1991).

The hope literature also suggests that relationships are key to fostering hope in others (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Benzein, Saveman, & Norberg, 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Eliott & Olver, 2002; Farran, Herth, & Popovich 1995; Haase et al., 1992; Jevne, Nekolaichuk, & Boman, 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin, Williams, Neugebauer, Remien, & Goetz 1990; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). Furthermore, the relationships that doctoral students have with others, especially relationships with faculty, have been shown to influence their academic experience and the dissertation process (Heath, 2002; Nerad & Cerny, 1993; Van Stone, Nelson, & Niemann, 1994). Together, these findings suggest that for doctoral students, hope-fostering relationships with others may play a critical role in whether or not they reach their academic goals.

For university administrators, the purposeful introduction of hope-engendering experiences or interactions can be a cost-neutral technique, which may enhance the well-being of students, foster empowering experiences in graduate school, and serve to improve the completion rates and time-to-complete rates of doctoral students. The first

step in introducing such a strategy is to explore the characteristics of hope-fostering or hope-threatening relationships that doctoral students have with individuals in their environment. This is the objective of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

Review of the Hope Literature

Hope has been described as "the voice that yearns to say 'yes' to life" and that "if nurtured and strengthened, it invites, encourages, pulls, pushes, cajoles, and seduces us to go forward" (Jevne, 1994, p. 8). What follows is a discussion of hope as it is presented in the research literature. I begin with an examination of the various definitions or, conceptualizations, of hope. This examination is followed by a review of findings related to the powerful impact or influence of hope. I then present a more focused discussion on the relational aspects of hope, and the research on how to foster hope within the context of relationship. Lastly, I explore the potential impact that hope can have on the doctoral student and argue for the need to foster hope, especially during the dissertation writing process.

The Construct of Hope

A literature review on the construct of hope yields a multitude of definitions or conceptualizations. The electronic databases that I searched for this literature review include: PsychInfo, Ovid, Eric, Academic Search Premier, and PROQUEST Dissertations & Theses. Overall, based on my review of the literature, it seems clear that a consensus among researchers and writers has not been reached with respect to how hope is defined. After conducting a meta-analysis of 46 hope related articles, Kylma and Vehvilainen-Julkunen (1997), reach a similar conclusion, noting that there was a "lack of precision about the descriptions [of hope]" (p. 364). Similarly, Eliot and Olver (2002), reviewed various definitions of hope, and conclude that, "precisely what hope is remains problematic, with many definitions, models, and conceptual frameworks proffered that

are not always interchangeable" (p. 174). What follows is a brief overview of some of the conceptualizations or typologies that have been proposed by researchers in the field of hope. This examination will help to draw attention to the similarities and differences found in the literature.

Snyder and colleagues

Snyder and colleagues have produced a considerable amount of research and writing in the area of hope. Hope, according to Snyder et al. (1991) is "a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals" (p. 571). Given the aforementioned definition, hope or hopeful thinking involves three elements: goals, pathway thinking, and agency thinking (Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002).

According to Snyder and colleagues, "we are intrinsically goal oriented when we think about our futures" (Snyder, 1995, p. 355). To achieve these goals, one must have "hope", that is, "pathway" and "agency" thinking. Pathway thinking provides us with the "ways" to achieve our goals; we are able to generate strategies that will bring us closer to our future directed objectives (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991). Agency thinking is the "will" to achieve our goals - the belief that "I will succeed". Agency thinking provides us with the energy that sustains us as we work towards achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991). According to Snyder and colleagues pathway and agency thinking are "reciprocal, additive, and positively related, although they are not synonymous" (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 571). Follow-up studies confirm that the pathway and agency components of hope are related but distinct factors (Babyak, Snyder, & Yoshinobu, 1993; Magaletta & Oliver, 1999). Snyder and colleagues highlight

the cognitive elements of hope and indicate that the emotional experience associated with hope, although relevant, is not a salient aspect of their conceptualization of hope (Snyder, 1995, Snyder 2000; Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder (2000) maintains that "in this model of hope, emotions *follow* one's thoughts about goal pursuits" (p. 13), and therefore, "emotions are a by-product of goal-directed thought" (p. 13). Snyder (1995) argues that "the quality of emotions reflect the person's perceived level of hope in the particular situation" (p. 355), and that "high" and "low" hope people will approach their goals with a positive or negative emotional state, respectively (Snyder, 1995; Snyder 2000; Snyder et al., 1991).

In their earlier work, Snyder and colleagues focused on what they referred to as "dispositional" hope, an enduring subjective level of hope that is not completely influenced by external factors (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991). Accordingly, Snyder and colleagues developed the 12-item self-report "Trait Hope Scale", which is designed to measure participants' dispositional hope (Snyder et al., 1991). Later, Snyder and colleagues constructed a 6-item self-report "State Hope Scale", designed to be a measure of ongoing goal-directed thinking (Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, & Higgins, 1996).

Nowotny

Nowotny (1989) argues that the precursors to hope are stressful situations, including but not limited to "…loss, life-threatening situations, hardships, major decisions, future planning, or challenges" (Nowotny, 1989, p. 57). In her study, which surveyed individuals who were physically healthy and those with cancer, she concludes that hope is multidimensional construct that has six dimensions. Specifically, she asserts

that the dimensions of hope includes, confidence in the outcome (e.g., positive outlook or confidence in one's abilities), relating to others (e.g., belief that others will be available to help), possibility of a future (e.g., belief that one can accomplish tasks or that there is a light at the end of the tunnel), spiritual beliefs (e.g., gain strength from prayer or scripture), active involvement (e.g., active rather than passive approach or actively sets goals), and coming from within (e.g., desire to maintain control over self) (Nowotny, 1989). Based on her conceptualization of hope, Nowotny developed the "Nowotny Hope Scale", a 29-item scale which is designed to assess each of the six components of hope (Nowotny, 1989; Nowotny, 1991).

Dufault and Martocchio

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) define hope as "a *multidimensional* dynamic life force characterized by a *confident* yet *uncertain* expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is *realistically* possible and *personally significant*" (p. 380). Dufault and Martocchio suggest that hope is made up of two spheres with six common dimensions. The two spheres of hope are "generalized hope" and "particularized hope". Generalized hope is described as "a sense of some future beneficial but indeterminate development" (p. 380), whereas particularized hope is believed to be connected to a hoping object. Overall, although distinct, the spheres of hope serve a similar function in that they both work to sustain us or to preserve or restore meaning in life.

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) assert that the spheres of hope have six common dimensions, namely, the affective, cognitive, behavioural, affiliative, temporal, and contextual. The affective dimension of hope, "focuses upon the sensations and emotions that are part of the hoping process" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 382). The affective

dimension can include, but is not limited to, such feelings as, desire, confidence, and uncertainty. The cognitive dimension of hope "focuses upon the processes by which individuals wish, imagine, wonder, perceive, think, remember, learn, generalize, interpret, and judge in relation to hope" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 384). The hoping person will also identify a hope object and conduct a "reality" assessment (i.e., to assess likelihood of attaining desired outcome). The behavioural dimension of hope, "focuses upon the action orientation of the hoping person in relation to hope" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 385). The hoping person will engage in activities that may or may not bring about a particular desired outcome. With respect to activities that do not directly bring out a particular outcome, hope is viewed as an energizing force that allows one to go about the process of living despite adversity (pp. 385-386). With respect to actions that bring one closer to ones goals, a person acts in a way that is consistent with achieving a desired outcome (e.g., strategic planning). The affiliative dimension "focuses upon the hoping person's sense of relatedness or involvement beyond the self as it bears upon hope" (p. 386). This connectedness can be manifested through one's relationship with people (alive or dead), with God or a "higher power", or with "other living things". The temporal dimension "focuses upon the hoping person's experience of time (past, present, and future) in relation to hopes and hoping" (p. 387). For example, a person may use memories of past successes to identify future goals that he or she believes are attainable. Further, a person will engage in actions in the present that are consistent with reaching the desired outcome. The final dimension of hope, described by Dufault and Martocchio, is the contextual dimension of hope, which "focuses upon life situations that surround, influence, and are a part of the person's hope" (p. 388). The act of hoping is

triggered within the context of life situations, for example, "...during time of loss, stress, crisis, and interactions with others" (p. 389).

Benzein, Saveman and Norberg

Benzein, Saveman and Norberg's (2000) work strives to capture the "lived experience of hope". These researchers interviewed several healthy Swedish non-religious adults and concluded their study by stating that, "hope is closely linked to the very existence of a human being" (p. 316) and that "without it there is little chance of being able to find a personal reason for living" (p. 315). Overall, their findings reveal three interconnected themes. Each theme is comprised of two subthemes and when taken together serves to capture the lived experience of hope. The first theme is labelled "hope related to being" and consists of the following subthemes: "to be – related to the self" and "to be – related to the world". Briefly, the former describes the experience of hope using such terms as, "an inner process", a sense of "belonging", a "will" to live, "finding meaning in life", "an awareness of one's possibilities in life", or "a positive experience". According to Benzein and colleagues, this experience of hope matures over time and is not easily influenced by external factors. The latter subtheme, "to be – related to the world" is experienced as a self-transcendence, or as a connectedness to one's past or to something larger than oneself. For example, they argue that, "continuity, knowing one's roots and about previous generations and seeing new generations growing up, is a part of hope" (p. 309).

The second theme revealed by Benzein et al. (2000) is labelled "hope related to doing" and it is made up of the subthemes: "setting goals" and "expected positive outcomes and consequences". Setting goals is viewed, in part, as: "future and action

oriented" and it is driven by internal processes. Goals are plagued with "uncertainty" and therefore require "courage" and a willingness to take "risks". Goals are established for self and other and are nurtured within the context of relationships (with self and other). Setting and pursuing goals includes a "realistic optimism", that is, an evaluation of available resources that can be employed to achieve success. The second subtheme, "positive outcome and consequences", involves the belief in or expectation of a better future, which is "significant for a person's well-being" (p. 311).

Finally, the third theme identified by Benzein and colleagues (2000) is "Hope related to the life process". "Reconstruction" and "Transition" are the subthemes that make up this theme. With respect to the first subtheme, "reconstruction", hope is viewed as originating in childhood and as maturing with increased life experiences. Additionally, as people age, the types of goals that are set also change. The subtheme "transitions" highlights the role that significant life transitions or phases of life play on hope. For example, the shift into a new stage of life (e.g., adulthood) is associated with the development of new goals (e.g., education).

Farran, Herth, & Popovich

Farran, Herth, and Popovich (1995) define hope as;

> …an essential experience of the human condition. It functions as a way of feeling, a way of thinking, a way of behaving, and a way of relating to oneself and one's world. Hope has the ability to be fluid in its expectations, and in the event that the desired object or outcome does not occur, hope can still be present (p. 6).

Upon reviewing the literature on hope, Farran et al. (1995) conclude that hope is comprised of four attributes. Specifically, according to Farran and colleagues hope is…

(1) "an experiential process", (2) "a spiritual or transcendent process", (3) "a rational thought process", and (4) "a relational process". Farran et al. summarize these four attributes as the *pain, soul, mind,* and *heart* of hope, respectively (p. 6).

In describing the first attribute, "an experiential process", Farran et al. (1995) suggest that one cannot fully understand or experience hope, without first understanding or experiencing its opposite - hopelessness. These writers argue that hope arises from adversity and suffering, in which a person's psychological, physical, spiritual, and social being in negatively impacted (pp. 6-7).

With respect to the second attribute of hope, "spiritual or transcendent", Farran et al. (1995) argue that "faith" and hope are inseparable, and that faith often serves as a foundation for hope. Hope, in this context, can be described as "faith" or belief "about something that has not yet been proven or a sense of certainty about that which is uncertain" (p. 8).

Hope as "a rational thought process" grounds hope in reality. Farran et al. (1995) identify several components of this attribute, specifically, goals (which are future directed and serve to motivate), resources (internal and external), active process (taking steps toward one's goals) control (sense that one has control over one's life), and time (past, present, and future are all taken into consideration) (p. 9).

The last attribute of hope, according to Farran et al. (1995) is, "a relational process", in which they argue that hope is "something that occurs between persons". For hope to occur in this context, Farran et al. speak to the importance of trust, and love within relationships.

Summary

With respect to elucidating the construct of hope, many researchers propose a multidimensional conceptualization of hope (e.g., Benzein et al., 2000; Benzein et al., 2001; Dufault & Martocchio, 1995; Farran et al., 1995; Nowotny, 1989) whereas others conceptualize hope as unidimensional. (e.g., Babyak et al., 1999; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1996; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002). Some researchers focus on the measurable or the quantifiable, that is, they focus on developing a conceptualization of hope that lends itself easily to statistical manipulation (Nowotny, 1989; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, LaPointe, Crowson, & Early, 1998). Other researchers focus not on the quantifiable, but rather, on the lived experience or meaning of hope (Benzein et al., 2001; Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran et al., 1995). Although a consensus has not been reached many researchers highlight the future directed and goal-oriented (Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1995; Farran et al., 1995; Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 1991), as well as the relational aspects of hope (Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Farran et al., 1995; Nowotny, 1989; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997).

Nowotny (1989) argues that hoping is triggered during stressful times in one's life. Arguably, working on one's dissertation is a stressful time in the lives of doctoral students, a time in which hoping processes are triggered. During this time, because of the stress that they are experiencing, doctoral students may be more aware of their hope, the lack of hope, or of the importance of hope in their lives. Furthermore, the need to engender hope during this stressful time may also be of critical importance. Hope may be

an important factor that allows students to overcome or cope with the stress that they are encountering. Without hope, students may be more likely to succumb to the pressures that they are experiencing and prematurely terminate their involvement in doctoral programs.

Many hope researchers suggest that hope is intimately connected to goal-setting and striving to achieve these goals (Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran et al., 1995; Snyder, 1995; Snyder, 2000; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). Doctoral students have set and are driven to achieve their academic goals. Unlike short-term goals, obtaining a doctoral degree, and working on a dissertation, requires years of persistent effort with few tangible rewards to sustain them as they work to achieve their degree. Hope, as suggested in the literature (e.g., Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002) may be the essential ingredient needed to sustain students – thus enabling them to carry on in the absence of tangible reinforcements Further, as suggested in the literature (e.g., Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Benzein et al., 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Eliott & Olver, 2002; Farran et al., 1995; Haase et al., 1992; Jevne et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin et al., 1990; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997) relationships play an important role in nurturing and fostering hope. For doctoral students, hope-fostering relationships with others may play a critical role in whether or not they reach their academic goals.

An Exploration of Hope

Although researchers differ with regards to their conceptualization of hope, there is considerable agreement with regards to the importance of hope in the lives of individuals. As suggested by the literature on hope, the process of becoming aware of and

searching for hope, especially during difficult or challenging times, has significant healing and helping properties. Researchers have examined the impact of hope within a variety of contexts, including a variety of physical settings, psychological dimensions, and academic realms. What follows is a brief overview of each of these contextual domains of hope.

Physical Settings and Physical Illness and the Study of Hope

With respect to physical health care contexts, hope has been explored in a variety of settings and with a variety of different client populations. For example, hope has been examined in a range of setting, including hospitals (e.g., Breitbart, Rosenfeld, Pessin, Kaim, Funesti-Esch, Galietta et al., 2000; Perakyla, 1991) and palliative or hospice care settings (e.g., Benzein, 2005; Duggleby, 2001; Nekolaichuk & Bruera, 1998; Parker-Oliver, 2002). The client populations in which hope has been examined are numerous and include, for example, individuals suffering with HIV and/or AIDS (e.g., Kylmä, Vehvilaeinen-Julkunen, & Laehdevirta, 2001a; Kylmä, Vehvilaeinen-Julkunen, & Laehdevirta, 2001b; Rabkin et al., 1990; Wong-Wylie, 2003; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997), cancer (e.g., Gil & Gilbar, 2001; Nowotny, 1989; Rustøen, & Hanestad, 1998; Wall, 2000), and spinal cord injuries (e.g., Lohne & Servinsson, 2004; Lohne & Severinsson, 2005; Smith & Sparkes, 2005).

Overall, the research conducted in the area of hope and physical illness has been categorized in several ways. For example, some authors focus on interviewing or assessing hope in patients or clients with an illness (e.g., Benzein et al., 2001; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliot, Witty, Herrick, & Hoffman, 1991; Gaskins, 1995; Wong-Whylie, 1997; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997), while others interview the caregivers (e.g.,

Cutcliffe & Grant, 2001; Kylma, Vehvilainen-Julkunen, & Laehdevirta, 2001a; Kylma, Vehvilainen-Julkunen, & Laehdevirta, 2001b). Alternatively, some authors focus on developing a conceptualization of hope (e.g., Benzein et al., 2001; Dufault & Martocchio, 1995; Kylma et al., 2001a; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Nowotny, 1989), while others focus on issues related to fostering hope in patients (e.g., Cutcliffe & Grant, 2001; Duggleby, 2001; Wong-Wylie, 1997; Wong-Wylie & Jevne 1997).

The preponderance of literature reflecting the exploration of hope in those suffering from physical illnesses, suggests that hope is viewed as a respected and important element in the treatment of patients. Credence to the importance of hope among the physically ill is found in the research that demonstrates that hope is positively associated with coping (e.g., Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani, & Thompson, 1998; Benzein et al., 2001; Elliott et al 1991; Hall, 1994; Morse & Doberneck, 1995) and negatively correlated with depression among physically ill patients (Rabkin et al., 1990).

Eliott (2005) argues that the study of hope has changed in recent history. In particular, she reports that, "hope as a topic did not feature strongly in medical and psychological research until the latter part of the twentieth century" (p. 4) and that during this time, "the spread of its evolution escalated" (p. 4). Eliott also contends that during this time, "medicine has established dominion over hope" (p. 29). Eliott also argues, perhaps somewhat controversially, that within the area of health sciences, "nothing much has changed from the 1990s to now" (p. 27), and that recent work has "merely expanded on, or illustrated, or used, or amalgamated in various (and increasing) permutations, already existing conceptions of hope" (p. 27). It is perhaps time to broaden the study of hope, and to focus on areas that have not been explored so thoroughly. This study, which

focuses on hope and the dissertation process, begins to address the gaps in the hope literature and add to our understanding of the role and experiences of hope.

The Psychological Dimension

With respect to the psychological sphere, hope and hopelessness have again been explored in a variety of contexts, including counselling or psychotherapy (e.g., Babits, 2001; Cutcliff, 1998; Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2000; Wong-Wylie, 2003), and from both the treatment providers' and clients' perspectives (e.g., Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). The concepts of hope and hopelessness have also been explored within the context of a multitude of mental health issues, including schizophrenia (e.g., Hoffman, Kupper, & Kunz, 2000; Kim, Jayathilake, & Meltzer, 2003; Littrell, Herth, & Hinte, 1996), depression (e.g., Campbell & Kwon, 2001; Stone, 1998; Thio & Elliott, 2005), and suicidality (e.g., Cutcliffe & Barker, 2002; Elliott & Frude, 2001; Kim et al., 2003; McGee, William, & Nada-Raja, 2001).

The importance of hope within the psychological realm is reflected in the research that has demonstrated that hope is positively associated with self-efficacy (e.g., Irving, Seidner, Burling, Pagliarini, & Robbins-Sisco, 1998; Landeen, 2000; Magaletta & Oliver, 1999), increased self-esteem (e.g., Kashdan, Pelham, Lang, Loza, Jacob, Jennings et al., 2002; Snyder, 1995), well-being (e.g., Kashdan et al., 2002; Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Yarcheski, Scoloveno, & Mahon, 1994), optimism (e.g., Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, 1995; Tierney, 1995), increased problem solving (e.g., Chang, 1998; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991) and coping skills (Fischer, 1988; Forbes, 1994; Herth, 1998; Irving, Telfer, & Blake, 1997).

One could argue that these concepts (e.g. self-efficacy, problem solving), which in the literature have been shown to be associated with hope (e.g., Snyder et al, 2000), all contribute in their own way to the dissertation process, and the completion of the dissertation. Rather than focus this study on other psychological constructs, I chose to study the dissertation process through the lens of hope, in part, because this area of hope has never before been explored.

The Academic Realm

The research in the area of hope and academics is limited. Of the research that is conducted in this area, the majority explores hope within the context of undergraduate education (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2002). Although limited in scope, this current research provides strong evidence for the power of hope within academia. It also identifies the need for further exploration in this area. Specifically, hope is demonstrated to be positively associated with academic success (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al 2002) and completion of academic programs (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002). For example, in a study conducted with undergraduate students, Snyder, Shorey et al. (2002) found that "high-hope" individuals as compared to "low-hope" people, as measured on the Hope Scale, had a higher cumulative GPA, an increased likelihood of graduating from college, and a lower likelihood of being dismissed from college because of poor grades (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002).

A review of the literature in this area revealed only three studies that focused on hope and graduate students. Two of these studies focused on the area of statistics anxiety. Onwuegbuzie (1998) found that low hope levels were related to greater anxiety in

statistics. Specifically, low hope participants had the "highest anxiety associated with worth of statistics, interpretation, tests and class, computational self-concept, fear of asking for help, and fear of the instructor" (p. 1315). In an exploratory follow-up study, Onwegbuzie and Snyder (2000) found that low levels of hope are associated with non-facilitative coping strategies with respect to studying for and taking statistics exams.

The third study, which was conducted by Onwegbuzie and Daley (1999), is only peripherally related to academics. Onwegbuzie and Daley surveyed 96 graduate students and attempted to examine the relationship between two dimensions of hope (agency and pathways) and several dimensions of self-perception. One noteworthy result of this study is the positive correlation or relationship between the agency (goal-directed determination) component of hope and graduate students' perceived scholastic competence - with higher agentic-hope students having a greater perception of their academic abilities. These researchers drew few conclusions with respect to their findings and highlighted the limits of making inferences based on correlational studies.

Summary

A review of the literature shows that hope has been examined across multiple spheres of life, and across a wide-range of research populations. Overall, the findings suggest that having hope is commonly identified as a key ingredient to a healthier life (e.g., physical, spiritual, social, psychological, academic well-being) whereas lack of hope can have devastating consequences for a person (e.g., feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, difficulty reaching one's goals).

Overall, the studies conducted in the field of academics, although pertinent, are limited in several ways. First, the majority of the studies focused on undergraduate

students. Second, those studies that focused on graduate student were limited in scope. Specifically, they focused largely on the area of student anxiety with the study of statistics. When working on a doctoral dissertation, students may or may not use statistics. For example, when conducting a qualitative study, statistics are often not utilized. When conducting a quantitative study, statistical analysis may play only a small role when considering the dissertation process in its entirety. Third, all studies within the academic realm focused on Snyder and colleagues' two-component conceptualization of hope (i.e. agency and pathways) with no exploration of alternative hope definitions or conceptualizations. Finally, these studies all use the Hope Scale created by Snyder and colleagues to assess a student's *current* level of hope, and then compare this score with other academic variables. Although relevant, Snyder's approach may not speak fully to the importance of hope in dissertation completion, nor does it fully address the issue of how to enhance a student's hope throughout the process. The current study attempts to address some of these limitations, the most salient of which involves deliberately exploring *hope-engendering strategies* for *graduate students* who have successfully completed a *doctoral dissertation.*

Hope in Relationships

Many researchers maintain that hope is experienced in relation to others and that it is through these relationships that hope can be nurtured or fostered (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Benzein et al., 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Eliott & Olver, 2002; Farran et al., 1995; Haase et al., 1992; Jevne et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin et al., 1990; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). These relationships are not limited to those formed with people and can include relationships that are formed with the self (Benzein

et al., 2000), animals (Gaskins & Forté, 1995), with nature (Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Haase et al., 1992), or God or a Higher power (Benzein, Norberg, & Saveman, 1998; Benzein et al., 2001; Benzein et al., 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Fischer, 1988; Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Haase et al., 1992; Hall, 1994; Nowotny, 1989).

Russinova (1999) maintains that, "[h]ope is something that occurs between persons in the context of a relationship; it is a shared experience between giver and receiver" (p. 51). Within the context of relationships with people, hope has been examined in relationships with physicians (Eliott & Olver, 2002; Wong-Wylie, 1997), nurses (Benzein et al., 2001; Cutcliffe & Grant, 2001; Cutcliffe & Barker, 2002; Fitzgerald-Miller, 1985; Forbes, 1994; Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Hinds, Quargenti, Fairclough, Bush, Betcher, Rissmiller et al., 1999) counsellors, therapists, or mental health practitioners (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Russinova, 1999; Snyder, 1995), family members (Barnum et al., 1998; Benzein et al., 2000; Fitzgerald-Miller, 1985; Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Hall, 1994; Nowotny, 1989; Wong-Wylie, 1997), friends (Barnum et al., 1998; Benzein et al., 2001; Fitzgerald-Miller, 1985; Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Hall, 1994), and co-workers (Bernard, 2000; Gaskins & Forté, 1995). Cutcliffe (1997) argues that relationships are essential if one is to sustain hope, and asserts that:

> ...whilst individuals can maintain their hope level to a certain extent, this cannot go on indefinitely. Eventually, the resource of hope will be depleted as it sustains the individual and the intra-personal strategies of hope inspiration become less effective. Thus creating the need for external help in order to replenish the

individual's hope and support the intra-personal hope inspiring strategies (p. 327).

Qualities of Hope-Inspiring Relationships

Several researchers examined the qualities or characteristics of these hope-inspiring relationships. What follows is a brief survey of the literature that summarizes some of the studies conducted in this area. An examination of these studies highlights some of the essential ingredients to hope-inspiring relationships.

Wong-Wylie and Jevne.

Wong-Wylie and Jevne (1997) conducted a critical incident study with HIV seropositive individuals. The aim of their study was to "explore the interactions between physicians and HIV seropositive patients that influence patient hope" (p. 35). Overall, the results suggests that relationships are key – that, "hope was found within the interpersonal relationship between doctor and patient" (p. 40). Wong-Wylie and Jevne indicate that five "critical requirements," within the patient-physician interaction, contribute to hope-full interactions, interactions that serve to sustain or enhance the patient's hope. Similarly, five opposite factors or "critical requirements" contribute to "hope-less interactions", that serve to diminished a patient's hope. The five pairs of critical requirements are identified as: "(a) being known as human/being known as a case, (b) connecting/disconnecting, (c) descriptive/prescriptive, (d) welcoming/ dismissing, and (e) informing/poorly informing" (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997, p. 40).

The requirement, "being known as human" includes such aspects as a physician's willingness *to know* the patient as well as the patient's desire to *be known* as an individual. Such a basis for a relationship allows for a "relationship of caring respect and

equal partnership, where honesty and integrity [are] facilitated" (p. 42). Patients felt as if their concerns were heard and they were included in decisions about their bodies or their treatment (p. 43). Conversely, hope-less interactions are characterized as "authoritative", "business-like" and "professional", in which patients felt judged and unable to make informed decisions about their own medical treatment.

The requirement "connecting", involves a rapport between physician and patient, where the patient perceives the "physician [as] truly caring for, listening to, understanding, and supporting and encouraging them as human beings" (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997, p. 45). "Disconnecting", on the other hand, is described as the absence of a doctor-patient rapport.

The requirement, "descriptive" involves a physician's willingness to carefully explain and discuss issues with the patient in language that is easily understood by all. Dialogue and patient input in decisions are encouraged. Patients are fully informed and free to discuss issues and make decisions related to their well-being. "Prescriptive" interactions, as described by participants, are void of such openness and choice with respect to medical treatments (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997).

The requirement, "welcoming" includes such descriptions as flexibility with respect to a doctors' availability and a "friendship bond" between patient and physician. The patient describes a "positive energy" within the interaction, and feelings of being distinctly "special", "important", and "loved". "Dismissing" interactions on the other hand, involves restricted time for medical appointments and perceptions that the doctor did not want to interact with them. Patients "feel like they are wasting the doctor's time"

and as a result of the doctors' interactions with them, they did "not want to interact with the doctor" (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997, p. 50).

The final requirement, "informing" and "poorly informing" refers specifically to the doctor's knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In hope-full interactions, doctors were able to provide accurate information in a caring fashion, whereas in hope-less interactions, doctors either "could not or would not share information with the patient" (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997, p. 52).

Cutcliffe and colleagues.

Cutcliffe and Barker (2002) suggest that lack of hope, or hopelessness, is a determining factor in suicide attempts. These researchers examined various approaches for working with suicidal clients, and argued that treatment providers use an "engagement –hope inspiration" approach when working with or caring for suicidal patients. Within this approach, Cutcliffe and Barker maintain that engagement is a means to inspire hope and suggest that engagement consists of several processes, including "forming a relationship (a human-human connection), conveying acceptance and tolerance, and hearing and understanding" (p. 616). Cutcliffe and Baker, assert that the quality of the relationship that the nurse develops with the suicidal patient is crucial and hope inspiring. Briefly, these researchers maintain that to inspire hope, one must convey a message of care and concern for the patient. Further, one must convey to the patient that his or her life has value or worth. To engender hope, the professional must also communicate a message of "unconditional acceptance and tolerance" (p. 616). To instil hope, according to Cutcliffe and Baker, a professional must truly hold these principles, and in their interactions with patients, they must be able to effectively demonstrate them

in a genuine way. Finally, to foster hope, a professional must create a supportive atmosphere or environment in which the patient is free to openly discuss his or her thoughts and feelings. In this environment, patients have the opportunity to be truly heard and understood by another. Overall, Cutcliffe and Grant (2001) argue that, "the presence of another human being who demonstrates acceptance, tolerance and understanding appears to embrace the fundamental prerequisites of caring practice and simultaneously convey the human qualities that have been identified as ways to inspire hope" (p. 428).

Finally, Cutcliffe (2001), as referred to in Cutcliffe and Baker (2002) maintains that, "even though hope appears to have such an important influence on some people's lives, the processes of hope inspiration needs to remain subtle and implicit rather than overt" (p. 617). Cutcliffe's position that one must be subtle in his or her attempts to instil hope is reflected in the "engagement – hope inspiration" approach to working with suicidal clients as outlined above.

Talseth, Gilje, and Norberg.

Talseth, Gilje, and Norberg (2001), conducted a phenomenological hermeneutic study with relatives of individuals who were at risk to commit suicide. These researchers conclude that, "being met is a passageway to hope" and describe "being met", as a common phrase in Norwegian culture, "which generally refers to acknowledging and noticing another human being while engaging in dialogue, i.e., being aware of the needs of the other" (p. 253). From this research several subthemes were generated, which then formed the basis of six interrelated themes. Given the researchers' assertion that "being met is a passage way to hope", one could argue that a closer examination of the factors or

themes contributing to the experience of "being met" will also give clues in how to engender hope in others.

Six themes of "being met" as identified by Talseth et al. (2001) include: "Being seen as human", "participating in I-Thou relationship with personnel [hospital staff]", "trusting personnel, treatment and care", "feeling trusted by personnel", "being consoled", and "entering into hope". Briefly, to be seen as human is described, in part, as "being acknowledged" and having their lived experience validated by a non-judgemental other. Being seen as human involves an ability to engage in meaningful dialogue, and an "awareness of not only what is said, but also, what is unsaid – what is felt, what is thought, what is meant" (Talseth et al., 2001, p. 254). Dialogue also involves being "present" with the individual, which, in part requires professionals to move beyond their professional persona and engage or *connect* with another in a genuine way. Being met involves opening up one's own vulnerabilities and connecting with another's painful emotional experience. Trust is an essential component when wanting to engage with another in this open, honest, and vulnerable way. According to Talseth et al. (2001) "being trusted invites participation [in dialogue] and is central to creating hope" (p. 254). Establishing such a relationship, offers "consolation" to another. According to Talseth et al. (2001), consolation is viewed as "a kind of healing" (p. 254), and "opens up the possibility of experiencing hope" (p. 254). Finally these researchers argue that through this experience, "options and alternatives become illuminated. [And] [s]eeing alternatives engenders hope" (p. 254).

Snyder and colleagues.

Snyder and colleagues approach the value of relationships in hope quite differently. Here relationships serve the instrumental function of helping one achieve one's goals. Snyder and colleagues maintain that to nurture hope within the context of a relationship, one must employ strategies that focus on one or all three of the interrelated components or elements of hope (i.e., goals, pathways and agency thinking) (Snyder, 1995; Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). Snyder (1995) asserts that, "often, changing only one component will serve as a catalyst for change in other components" (p. 359) and thus enhance hope.

Briefly, according to Snyder and colleagues, focusing on future oriented goals is one way to foster hope. Goal related strategies to engender hope can include assisting with the development of concrete rather than vague or abstract goals (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003), as well as approach rather than avoidance goals (Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2003). Snyder and colleagues also assert that when helping someone establish goals, one should facilitate the process of uncovering *intrinsic* goals rather than outlining or creating goals for the person (Snyder et al., 2003). Finally, Snyder and colleagues recommend helping others to establish several goals (in the event that one goal is blocked) (Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2003), in various life domains (Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002), and to prioritize these goals in order of importance (Snyder, Feldman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2003).

A second way to foster hope, according to Snyder and colleagues, is to focus on agentic thinking. This approach can involve assisting with raising the person's awareness of the "self-talk" or thoughts related to hope. If, for example, these cognitions are

counterproductive to hope (e.g., "I can't succeed"), one can then work to replace these negative cognitions with more hope-enhancing ones (e.g., "I will succeed) (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 2003). Further, one can also assist others to "re-frame" past experiences. For example, rather than attributing past failures to inherent qualities within the person (e.g., "I am a failure"), one can look to the past and attribute the failure to having employed the wrong strategy (e.g., "I should have tried something different"). Finally, one can assist in enhancing agency thinking by helping others look at their past successes or the past experiences of others. In looking at these past successes one can begin to think - "I did it before, I can do it again!" or "If he can do it so can I" (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003).

One final approach to nurturing hope is to focus on the pathway component of hope. In this approach, one must help others to develop the ways to achieving his or her goals. Snyder and colleagues suggest that it is best to develop several different routes or "pathways" to achieve a desired goal. The development of alternative strategies is especially beneficial when one encounters barriers to his or her goals (Snyder et al., 2003; Snyder, Sigmon, & Feldman, 2002). With respect to larger or long-term goals, Snyder and colleagues advocate for the development of *sub-goals* (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003; Snyder, Sigmon et al., 2002). The development of these sub-goals serve as a positive reinforcement for the person – that achieving success with respect to attaining these sub-goals serves to assist with motivation to continue along with the pursuit of the larger goal (i.e., agentic thinking) (Snyder et al., 2003). As mentioned earlier, relationships are important as they serve as the foundation to helping one achieve one's

goals. For example, within the relationship between supervisors and student, supervisors can use active strategies to help to foster hope in the students.

Summary.

Overall, the research on hope points to the central importance of a supportive relationship. It appears that to instil hope *in* another, one must first possess hope *for* the person (Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Manrique, 1984; Russinova, 1999), and that both verbal and nonverbal aspects of the interactions can serve to engender hope (Cutcliffe & Grant, 2001; Eliott & Olver, 2002). It appears that hope is engendered within the context of a trusting, and genuinely supportive and caring relationship, in which the humaneness of both parties is recognized. Hope-fostering relationships appear to share characteristics of the "person-centered" therapy approach developed by Carl Rogers. Rogers maintains that the therapist and relationship qualities of "genuineness" (e.g., congruence between therapist actions and feelings), "unconditional positive regard" (e.g., warmth, acceptance), and "empathy" (e.g., "immersion in the client's world of experience") are sufficient factors to initiate positive client change (Raskin & Rogers, 1995, p. 143).

Some researchers argue that one must be subtle in his or her attempt to engender hope (Cutcliffe, 2001 as referred to in Cutcliffe and Baker, 2002) whereas others argue that it is best to be deliberate (Edey & Jevne, 2003; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003; Snyder et al., 2002). Within a context of a supportive relationship, Snyder and colleagues argue, one can purposefully foster hope by helping others focus on their goals, as well as on helping to enhance their belief that they can succeed and assisting with developing the pathways to reach these goals (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003). I share the belief that

one can, or perhaps should, be deliberate in his or her attempts to foster hope in others. As such, this study focuses on how others, through their interactions, can influence the hope of doctoral students

Summary of the Hope Literature

A review of the hope literature yields multiple definitions or conceptualizations of hope. Although there appears to be many similarities between the various conceptualizations of hope (e.g., future orientation, relational aspects), a consensus has not been reached. Similarly, my personal definition or description of hope, although similar, varies somewhat from the ideas proposed by other researchers. My description of hope, I believe, is most closely linked to the ideas of Dufault and Martocchio (1985) and Snyder et al. (1991).

I believe that there are two aspects to hope. One aspect, which I describe as an all-encompassing type of hope is, similar to Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) description of "generalized hope." For me, this type of hope provides someone with the will to live. This aspect of hope is the driving force that allows us to grow and develop. It serves as our motivation for seeking, and is also the consequence of having, meaningful relationships. The second aspect of hope, as I see it, involves goal-directed or outcome oriented thoughts or actions. I do not believe that hope is passive rather, that hope requires a person to be active in the pursuit of goals. In this respect, my definition of hope is similar to Dufault and Martocchio's description of the "particularized hope." I also believe that it is consistent with Snyder and colleagues' ideas of "agency" and "pathway" components to hope. Given the lack of consistency with respect to the definition of hope, and that my definition is but one of many, hope was not defined for the participants of

this study. Rather than approach the study with a preconceived or predetermined definition of hope, participants were encouraged to use their voice in defining their experiences of hope for themselves.

Hope has also been explored in multiple spheres of life (e.g., physical, psychological, and academic), and when present, appears to be a key ingredient in human functioning across all realms. A literature review of the area of hope and academia found that hope is associated with academic success (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al 2002). Unfortunately, only a small number of studies exist which examine hope in the graduate school experience, with the preponderance of studies focused on the undergraduate experience. Of the studies conducted that examine hope from a graduate student perspective, they appear to be limited in scope, focusing largely on statistic anxiety (e.g., Onwuegbuzie, 1998; Onwegbuzie & Snyder (2000). The present study attempts to broaden the exploration of hope in the realm of academia by purposefully examining the experience of hope from a doctoral student's perceptive.

Finally, the literature on hope suggests that relationships play a key role in hope and are central in fostering hope in another (e.g., (Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne, 2003; Manrique, 1984; Russinova, 1999). Some researchers advocate for a deliberate approach to fostering hope in others (e.g. Edey & Jevne, 2003; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003; Snyder et al., 2002). I share this view. I believe that it is empowering to begin from a position that one can be deliberate in nurturing the hope in another, because implicit in this position is that we can *choose* to be active about nurturing or fostering hope.

I believe that based on the literature review, one could reasonably propose that doctoral students are in a position to *need* hope to succeed in their goal-directed academic pursuits and that others are in a position to *choose* to work to foster hope. It is this proposal that forms the foundation of this research study.

Research Question

Research indicates that completion of a doctoral program is aided or hindered, in part, by the relationships that the student has with others. For example, one study found that two primary factors to which students attributed their academic success were a supportive family and a supportive faculty (Van Stone et al., 1994). Similarly, regularly scheduled supervision meetings are "important contributors to (a) the likelihood that a thesis will be completed, and (b) the satisfaction that PhD candidates feel with their supervision…" (Heath, 2002, p. 52). Overall, it appears that quality of relationships with others has important implications with respect to program completion (Heath, 2002). These findings suggest a need to study the quality of relationships that students have with others throughout their dissertation process.

Furthermore, given the demonstrated importance of hope in academic success (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002), successful program completion (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002), and goal attainment (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991), hope is likely to have implications for graduate students as well.

This study investigates the ways in which relationships, and specifically interactions, may foster or threaten doctoral student hope during the completion of a dissertation project. This may provide valuable insight with implications for the successful completion of a doctoral program, as well as student persistence with respect

to completing their degree in the face of obstacles (e.g., financial difficulties, conflict with supervisors).

This study attempts to explore the question, "What is the influence of interpersonal interactions on the hope of doctoral students who are in the process of writing their doctoral dissertation?" That is, this study aims to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-fostering" and/or "hope-threatening" interactions as experienced by doctoral students who are working to achieve what is often the final step toward their academic goal.

CHAPTER FOUR

Method

Approach to the Study

The method of inquiry for this study is the critical incident technique (CIT). It should be noted that the term "critical" does not refer to an emergency or life or death situation (Carpenter 2000), rather, the critical incident technique is "essentially a procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behavior in a defined situation" (Flanagan as cited in Cheek, O'Brien, Ballantyne, & Pincombe, 1997, p. 671) and "which have a special relation to some outcome" (Plutchik, Conte, & Karasu, 1994). The critical incident technique was first developed by a psychologist, John Flanagan. This qualitative research approach was originally designed to "help identify critical components of effective pilot performance" (Flanagan as referred to in Sautter & Hanna, 1994, p. 95).

The popularity of this research approach is evident in the literature, which also highlights its multidisciplinary appeal. The critical incident technique has been used in a variety of disciplines to examine a wide variety of phenomena. For example, the critical incident technique has been used in the field of evaluation (Sautter & Hanna, 1994), education (Chiu, 1975; Dirks, Elliott, & Lowe, 1967; Jung, 1971; Sautter & Hanna, 1994) nursing (Bryne, 2001; Cheek et al., 1997; Redfern & Norman, 1999a; Redfern & Norman, 1999b), and psychology (Flanagan & Schmid, 1959; Fly, Van Bark, Weinman, Kitchener, & Lang, 1997; Fukuyama, 1994; Plutchik et al., 1994; Wong-Wylie, 1997). Researchers have used the critical incident technique to examine a vast number of different phenomena, including the quality of teaching encounters (Sautter & Hanna,

1994), quality of nursing practices (Redfern & Norman, 1999a; Redfern & Norman, 1999b), disciplinary problems in education (Chiu, 1976), job performance (Ronan, Talbert, & Mullet, 1978), identification of difficult client behaviour in psychotherapy (Plutchik et al., 1994), ethics (Fly, van Bark, Weinman, Kitchener, & Lang, 1997), supervision issues in counselling (Fukuyama, 1994), teaching (Dirks, Elliott, & Lowe, 1967), and psychopathology (Flanagan & Schmid, 1959). Researchers have also successfully used this approach to study hope-enhancing and hope-reducing interactions between HIV seropositive patients and their physicians (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997), as well as the interactions between HIV/AIDS patients and their families (Wong-Wylie, 1997).

Woolsey (1986) maintains that two basic tenets of the critical incident technique are that (1) "factual reports of behaviour are preferable to ratings and opinions based on general impressions and [2] that only behaviours which make a significant contribution to the activity should be reported" (p. 244). As reported by Norman, Redfern, Tomalin, and Oliver (1992) "what constitutes 'significant' will vary according to the activity observed, but in all cases the focus is upon 'extreme behaviours' which are related either positively or negatively to the general aim of the study" (p. 591). Ultimately, the critical incident technique rests on the assumption that "critical incidents will be memorable, making their capture possible either through interview, observation, or self-reporting" (Carpenter, 2000).

Redfern and Norman (1999a) report that one advantage of using the critical incident technique is that "in addition to facilitating recall, respondents can identify their feelings about the incidents and clarify their perceptions…in some depth" (p. 408).

Further, these researchers argue that "the technique minimizes rhetoric by requiring respondents to ground their views…in incidents that they actually experienced or observed" (Redfern & Norman, 1999a, p. 408).

Walker and Truly, as referred to in Sautter & Hanna (1994) maintain that the critical incident technique is an especially effective approach when the research question addresses any of the following: "(1) the importance of human interaction in the phenomenon under study, (2) the need for hypothesis development in early stages of research, and (3) the significance of experiential process in the observation of the concept" (p. 95). The objective my study lent itself well to the conditions set forth by Walker and Truly. For example, with respect to the first condition, the importance of human interaction in the phenomenon under study, previous research findings suggest that hope exists *in relation* to others (Beavers & Kaslow, 1991; Benzein et al., 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Haase, Britt et al., 1992; Jevne et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin et al., 1990; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997) and that human interactions are influential *on* the hope of another (Barnum et al., 1998; Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Bernard, 2000; Benzein, Norberg et al., 2001; Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Fitzgerald-Miller, 1985; Forbes, 1994; Gaskins & Forté, 1995; Hall, 1994; Hinds et al., 1999; Snyder, 1995; Wong-Wylie, 1997; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). The focus of my study is on human interactions, that is, their hope-fostering and/or hope-threatening qualities and as such, this study meets the first condition proposed by Walker and Truly.

With respect to the second condition set forth by Walker and Truly, although "hypothesis development" is in reference to the quantitative research framework, there is some application to the current study. Specifically, given the lack of previous research in

this area, the use of this approach allows for the *exploration* of several factors associated with the dynamics of these interpersonal interactions, and therefore does not place premature limits on what *can* or *should* be explored within the area. The use of this method allows for new ideas or "hypotheses" to be generated.

Finally, the third condition, "the significance of experiential process in the observation of the concept", speaks to the subjective nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Sautter & Hanna, 1994). The experience of hope is subjective in nature, that is, experienced *by* or *within* a person and therefore lends itself to the third condition set forth by Walker and Truly.

Overall, my study appears to meet all three conditions set forth by Walker and Truly and as such, the use of the critical incident technique as the method of inquiry appears justified.

The five steps to the Critical Incident Method

Flanagan outlined five stages or steps to the critical incident method. They are: (1) establishing the general aim of the activity; (2) setting plans and specifications; (3) collecting the information; (4) analysing it; and (5) interpreting and reporting the findings (Norman et al.,1992, p. 592). What follows is a brief discussion of each of these five steps. The steps are outlined in this chapter because they helped to shape the design of this study. In addition to outlining the steps, I provide a brief overview of how each of these steps was incorporated in the current study.

Flanagan's first step, *establishing the general aim of the activity*, involves identifying the purpose of the study. This step is important because "it is central to the development of the CIT interview guide" (Norman et al., 1992, p. 593). Woolsey (1986)

also asserts that the aim of the activity "must be stated in a simple and clear form" (p. 244)

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-enhancing" and/or "hope-threatening" interactions as experienced by doctoral students who are working on their doctoral dissertation. For the purpose of the study, interactions are defined as all encounters (e.g., face to face, telephone, email) with another, which may or may not include verbal dialogue. The purpose or aim of the current study was clarified prior to conducting this research, and it was outlined in advance, in the research proposal. The aim or objective of the study was also described to each participant prior to his or her involvement in the study. Each participant was provided with Participant Orientation Instructions (see Appendix A) that clearly outlined the aim of the study. Additionally, prior to each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study. For the purpose of this study, participants were asked to reflect upon the dissertation process in its entirety, ranging from the early stages of formulating ideas and securing a supervisor to completing the final draft and defending the document. Because the aim of the study was clearly identified, I was able to focus our interviews on the topic of interest. Furthermore, because the aim of the study was shared with the participants prior to their involvement in the study, as well as just prior to the interviews, clarity and mutual understanding between the research and the participants about the purpose of the interviews was enhanced.

The second step, *setting plans and specifications*, involves deciding, "(a) which person will make the observations; (b) which individuals, activities, or groups will be observed, and (c) which of their behaviours or experiences will be observed (Woolsey,

1986, p. 244). The participants are the "observers", and they were asked to reflect upon and recall, in as much detail as possible, their observations of others with whom they interacted. With respect to deciding who will be observed, individuals that were observed included any person(s) (1) who interacted with the participant while he or she worked on the doctoral dissertation and (2) who according to the participant, had a significant impact on his or her level of hope. Finally, the experience to be observed and reported included any interaction between the participant and another person that substantially influenced the hope of the participant. Information that was reported included all relevant detail pertaining to the hope-fostering or hope-threatening interaction, as well as the perceived meaning or intent of the interaction.

The third step, *collecting the information*, can take two forms, the "direct" and "retrospective" forms. Briefly, the former requires the researcher to collect the critical incidents directly by observing the incident as it occurs. The latter technique involves "interviewing respondents about their recollection of events or activities" (Redfern & Norman, 1999a, p. 408). In this study, the retrospective form of the technique is used. The decision to use the retrospective form is obvious, given the nature of the question. It was impossible to collect the data directly (i.e., observe hope impacting interactions directly). The primary method of data collection was an interview format.

Flanagan's fourth step is *analyzing the data.* A more thorough discussion of how the interview data was analyzed can be found in the Data Analysis section of this chapter. Briefly, the data analysis followed a similar procedure as outlined in previous research (Redfern & Norman, 1999a; Redfern & Norman, 1999b), and involved using "critical

happenings" (i.e., a description of the event and its associated meaning) as the basic unit of analysis.

The fifth step, as outlined by Flanagan, involves *interpreting and reporting the findings*. For the purpose of this study, the findings were reported in a manner consistent with that described in Woolsey (1986). Specifically, I used self-explanatory or descriptive themes, categories, and subcategories in the reporting of the findings. As Woolsey (1986) notes, "simplicity, brevity and clarity are essential here" (p. 251). Additionally, when it was appropriate to do so, excerpts from the data were used as illustrations. Furthermore the Discussion chapter of the document explores the relationship between the current findings and/or theoretical perspectives or previous findings described in the literature. Also included in the Discussion chapter is a description of the recommendations that arise from the findings of the study, as well as suggestions for areas for future research.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling technique was used to guide the recruitment of participants for this study. As described by Patton (1990):

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. (p. 169)

Patton explains that "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

Patton (1990) has identified 16 strategies for purposeful sampling. For the purpose of the study, when selecting participants, I used the "intensity sampling" strategy described by Patton. According to Patton, "[a]n intensity sample consists of information rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)" (p. 171). Patton argues that one can use this strategy when studying emotional experiences such as intense feelings of loneliness or jealousy. Applied to this study, participant inclusion was granted to those who initially reported that they had had experiences or interactions that *significantly impacted* their hope, suggesting that they "manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely".

I outlined four requirements for participant inclusion in this study. First, all participants in this study were individuals who had successfully completed their doctoral studies; that is, individuals who have been formally granted their PhD from a Canadian university. Each participant had received his or her degree, and thus, successfully wrote and defended his or her dissertation.

Second, participation in this study included only graduates of applied programs, that is, programs that prepare students to work in human service professions. The rationale for including only those from applied programs came, in part, from a general review of the literature on graduate programs, which had a tendency to make several distinctions between programs of study. For example, related specifically to the dissertation process, Hirt and Muffo (1998) argue that topic selection, dissertation requirements, and length of dissertation often vary by discipline, rendering certain degrees or dissertations more difficult to complete than others. For example, with respect to differences in topic selection, Nerad and Cerny (1993) maintain that students in the

social sciences and humanities have "more difficulty deciding which topics were feasible and which goals were achievable within a certain period of time (p. 30). Similarly, other differences that have a direct impact on dissertation completion have been noted, for example, the quality of and type of advisory relationships. Nerad and Cerny maintain that:

> There are pronounced differences between the sciences and humanities in the way in which research is conducted. Graduate students in the sciences and engineering acquire research skills through an apprenticeship mode of research instruction and teamwork in laboratory setting where they benefit from frequent social interactions. The laboratory research and the dissertation work often coincide and they are often supported by a research assistantship under the direction of a faculty investigator. (pp. 31-32).

Students in the social sciences and humanities, on the other hand tend to write their dissertation in isolation. Students in these faculties have a perception that faculty do not fully understand their research topic, and therefore, are less motivated to meet with faculty (Nerad & Cerny, 1993).

Overall, the purpose for presenting the aforementioned information is to highlight that graduate programs are not homogeneous. For the purpose of the current study, I did not attempt to address all aspects that render programs distinct from one another; I did however, make one general consideration and included only students in applied programs. All but one participant in the study was granted a degree in an applied field. This participant was granted a doctoral degree in an experimental program; however, given the nature of her program, she was able to engage in clinically driven course work

and internships. Her program, although technically experimental, provided her with ample clinical opportunities, and since being granted the degree, she has worked in a clinical or applied setting.

The third requirement for inclusion in this study was that the potential participant, while working on his or her doctoral dissertation, must have reported that they had experienced an interaction(s) that *significantly impacted* his or her level of hope. Finally, the fourth requirement was that they must be able to recall, in *sufficient detail*, the hope-impacting interaction(s) so as to be able to convey the experience.

Participation in this study was not limited with respect to length of time since receiving the degree. Although the passage of time may have negatively influenced the detailed recollection of events, I decided not to limit participation because as argued by, Norman et al. (1992) the subjective meaning is equally as important as the "facts" as relayed by the participants. Furthermore, as a safeguard, participants, after reading the Participant Orientation Instructions, which detailed the objectives of the study, had an opportunity to decide whether they were good candidates for the study. Specifically, they were able to determine for themselves, whether they had hope-impacting interactions with others throughout the dissertation process, and whether they could recall these incidents in sufficient detail so as to describe the experience. Participants were not compensated for, or coerced into their involvement in the study, and therefore any motives, other than a willingness to share their experiences, were minimized.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited either directly or indirectly (through my association with others). First, in the direct method of recruitment, I contacted several individuals, in

person and by email, who were known to me as having successfully completed their doctoral degree. I informed them of my research and asked whether they were interested in learning more about the study. If they expressed an initial interest, I provided them with the participant orientation information and a copy of the consent form, as well as the demographic questionnaire for review. Upon reviewing the information, participants made a decision about whether to participate. Interviews were arranged for those who wished to participate in the study.

Second, with the indirect method of recruitment, a third party (i.e., a professional colleague, a fellow graduate student, and a professor) provided written information about my study (i.e., participant orientation information, consent form, and demographic questionnaire) to potential participants. Those participants who had an interest in participating in the study contacted me (either via e-mail or telephone), and arrangements were made to meet for the interview.

Because third parties were involved in the recruitment of potential participants, I am uncertain about how many people were approached to be part of the study. I am aware of three people who initially expressed an interest to learn more about the study; however, upon reading the material determined that they were not suitable candidates for the study. In explaining the reason behind their decision, all three indicated that they did not identify hope as a part of their experiences in the doctoral program. The fact that these three individuals effectively screened themselves out of the study adds credibility to the safeguard built in the recruitment procedures (i.e., must have significant hope-impacting experiences). Furthermore, as a result of this screening out, I can also have more confidence in the purposeful sampling technique used in the study, that is,

participants in this study were only "information rich cases whose study will illuminate the question under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

With regards to the number of participants to be included in this study, I was guided by the suggestion provided by Woolsey (1986), who maintains that because there is no predetermined sample size, the "general rule of thumb is to collect incidents until redundancy appears" (p. 246), I conducted interviews until redundancy occurred in the interview data. In previous research, which used the critical incident technique to examine hope-full and hope-less interactions, between six (Wong-Wylie, 1997) and nine (Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997) individuals were interviewed, and in each study 22 critical incidents were generated. In this study, the objective was to gather minimally 30 incidents. I made an assumption that because 22 critical incidents were sufficient in previous research on hope influencing interactions (Wong-Wylie, 1997) that approximating this number would be sufficient for this study. I conducted a total of eight interviews. In this study, participants talked about 34 distinct relationships, and shared 60 incidents.

Data Collection

Heinrich (2001) maintains that, "...when researchers and participants share the same lived experience, it is particularly important for researchers to share their own stories prior to initiating data collection" (p. 90). Furthermore, Heinrich argues that "this process both deepens the researchers' reflexivity and reduces the impulse to share their own stories in subsequent [interviews]" and provides an opportunity to refine interview questions (p. 90). In keeping with this suggestion, prior to conducting any interviews, I engaged in a process similar to that of participants. To do this effectively, I enlisted the

help of a trusted friend who had qualitative research training. First, I wrote about three incidents that I had encountered which I felt had impacted my hope. My friend and I then used this information to help shape an interview in which I talked in great detail about these hope-impacting moments.

Heinrich (2001) suggests that the information obtained through this self-reflective exercise can be included in the data analysis; however given that I did not meet the inclusion criteria for my study (i.e., degree completion) I did not include the material generated from this process in the data analysis. Instead, I included this information in the introduction of this document.

One noticeable difference between the original design of the data collection as outlined in the research proposal and the actual procedures used in the study is that I met with all but one participant only once. Because of the length of one interview, I met with one participant two times because we chose to divide the interview into two sections. Initially, I had proposed to meet with each participant three times, prior to the interview, for the interview, and after the interview to review the findings. For practical considerations (i.e., scheduling issues, geographic location of participants, comfort level with electronic communication), almost all communication that occurred pre and post interviews occurred electronically rather than in the form of face-to-face meetings as originally proposed. One conversation occurred on the telephone.

Prior to all interviews, each participant received the Participant Orientation Instructions (see Appendix A), Consent to Participate Form (see Appendix B), and the Demographic Information Questionnaire (see Appendix C). I provided each participant with this information via email prior to meeting with them for the first time. The

Participant Orientation Instructions included information that clearly outlined the purpose of the study and outlined the participants' involvement in it. All participants had an opportunity to review this information and ask clarifying questions, either via email or in person prior to the interview.

The Consent to Participate Form was attached to the initial email sent to participants so that each participant had a clear understanding of what it meant to consent to participate in the study. If participants agreed to participate, prior to the interview, they were asked to sign two copies of the consent form - one copy for my records and one for their records.

Finally, upon signing the consent form, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire designed to capture relevant demographic information. This information helped to illuminate the characteristics of the participants and therefore helped to further refine the parameters of this study as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings. Because the questionnaire was provided to participants prior to our interview, three participants chose to fill out the questionnaire and return it to me electronically in advance of our interview.

Prior to our interviews, participants were asked to engage in a "critical incident recollection exercise" similar to that employed by Wong-Wylie (1997). Each participant was invited to spend some time recalling 1-5 incidents in which his or her hope was significantly influenced by interactions with others. The invitation to share only "significant" interactions followed the "intensity sampling" technique as described by Patton (1990). Briefly, Patton maintains that in this approach "one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 171). For this study, information obtained

from learning about significant hope-fostering or hope-threatening interactions were the most valuable, as they more easily illuminated the key components required to help foster hope in doctoral students who are working on completing their doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this exercise was to help participants provide "snapshot accounts" of significant interactions, which was to then be used to guide the interview. The following instructions (see Appendix D) were provided via email.

> The purpose of this study is to look at the different types of encounters that you have had while working on your doctoral dissertation. These encounters or interactions may have happened at any time during your dissertation experience from design to writing or defending your final draft. These interactions may have been with your advisor, your partner, your peers, etc. The salient aspect of these interactions is that they had a **significant impact** on your hope, either leaving you feeling more hope-full or more hope-less. What I would like for you to describe to me is the exact details of these specific encounters as you remember them. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-inducing" and/or "hope-reducing" interactions, as experienced by doctoral students who are working to meet the requirements of their doctoral program. It is really up to you what interactions you choose to share with me, with one exception, that is, the interactions should have had a **considerable impact** on your hope.

It was clear rather early in the process that most participants did not want to write about their experiences in advance of participating in the interview. A decision needed to be made about whether to exclude potential participants from involvement in the study based on this alone. Upon consultation with my supervisor, we agreed to allow participants the choice to provide written accounts prior to the interview, but that it was not a requirement for participation in the study. We came to this collective decision for the following reasons: (1) We agreed that the initial intent of the exercise was to help facilitate recall of significant events, and the intent was not to use the information as data for analysis, (2) Most participants in qualitative research interviews are not required to engage in a pre-interview exercise, and yet participants

are able to provide valuable information in the interview. (3) That as a researcher, I could use my interview skills to facilitate recall and gather detailed information from participants.

The interviews varied in length, ranging from 45 –180 minutes (See Appendix D for Interview Guide). Each interview was audio-recorded. I later transcribed each interview verbatim. Upon completion of the interview, I recorded any behavioural observations that were made throughout the interview, as well as any of my thoughts or feelings that arose from the interview.

Data Analysis

In the critical incident literature there appear to be different views with regards to what constitutes the "basic unit of analysis" when analyzing the collected data. To elaborate, Norman et al. (1992) argue that there are three common presuppositions associated with Flanagan's CIT. They are:

> 1. The term critical incident is used to refer to a clearly demarcated scene… 2. If a detailed account of what actually happened cannot be obtained from the observer, that incident is not valid. 3. The "critical incident" itself is the basic unit of analysis (p. 595).

Contrary to these aforementioned guidelines that Flanagan established, Norman et al. argue that "critical incidents need not always be demarcated scenes with a clear beginning and end" (p. 590), and maintain that, despite Flanagan's position, incidents without a clear beginning and end, need not be excluded from the analysis. Norman et al. suggest that it is actually the "critical happening[s]" that forms a better unit of analysis. To elaborate, these researchers maintain that it is through the discussion of

critical incidents, that critical happenings are unveiled (Norman et al., 1992). Redfern and Norman (1999a), in discussing their previous work, argue that "it is not the 'incident' that is 'critical'. Instead what is critical is the observed events (happenings) that are revealed by the incident and are identified as meaningful to the respondent" (p. 409).

Researchers have also noted that participants find it difficult to relay a description of their critical incidents in a way that follows the guidelines established by Flanagan (Cheek et al., 1997; Norman et al., 1992; Wong-Wylie, 1997). Researchers argue that rather than providing clearly defined incidents, "critical incidents...may arise from respondents summarizing their overall experience within their description of the incident" (Norman et al., 1992, p. 590). Furthermore, Norman et al. maintain that validity does not necessarily involve the accuracy of the detailed account, but rather, "validity may be established by the fact that respondents appear to recount what actually happened as they saw it, and what they said is clearly important to them" (p. 590).

To analyze the data, I used techniques similar to those used by Norman and Redfern (1999a; 1999b) to study quality of nursing care. Because I was interested in studying the impact on hope, rather than quality of nursing care, their technique was modified slightly to better accommodate this study. These slight modifications will be noted in the following sections.

In the first step, I read and re-read each transcript to identify the "critical happenings". Critical happenings included both a description of the event and its associated meaning for the participant. At this point, Norman and Redfern (1999a)

indicate that "critical happenings have either a positive or negative value" (p. 410), which they describe as the "quality indicators". These quality indicators are later subcategorized by value and topic. In this study, the critical happenings were examined for their "hope-threatening" (-) or "hope-fostering" (+) quality. Subcategories were generated. Specifically, these "quality indicators" were separated by value (i.e., + or -) and grouped by topic area. I then derived categories from these subcategories, which helped to further reduce the data (see Appendix E).

Themes were generated from the categories. To generate themes, Redfern and Norman (1999a) explain that "categories [are] grouped into themes which [are] neutrally expressed and so [contain] both positive and negative categories" (p. 410). For the purpose of this study, themes did not become value neutral. Themes were generated separately from the "hope-threatening" and "hope-fostering" categories. I decided to keep these categories separate, so as to not assume that *any* factor can work to both foster and threaten the participants' level of hope. For example, I could not assume that the *presence* of a factor would enhance hope, whereas the *absence* of the same factor would reduce hope. Finally, because participants varied with respect to their experiences of hope in the dissertation process (e.g., largely hope enhancing, largely hope-threatening, a mix of hope-fostering and hope-threatening), themes, categories, and subcategories were not endorsed by all participants.

Trustworthiness

Unlike the quantitative research tradition, at the foundation of much qualitative research is the belief that there is no one objective reality, that instead we all experience reality differently – that our understanding of the world is subjective not

objective (Patton, 1990). The implication of this philosophy on the research is that the researcher's subjectivity and influence cannot be completely separated from the research process, that "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 1990, p. 14). The researcher's impact on the study is especially influential during the analyzing of the data, and findings and conclusions drawn from the data can become suspect if steps are not taken to ensure a greater accuracy or trustworthiness of such information.

Several steps were taken to help increase the trustworthiness of the findings and conclusions drawn from the data. First, as described in the Data Collection section of this document I went through the process of writing and talking about my own hope-impacting experiences. This exercise not only helped me to develop and refine interview questions, but also, helped to raise awareness of my biases and assumptions. Second, I created a subjectivity audit, "a process in which the researcher systematically records and reviews his or her subjective perceptions and feelings while a study is in progress to asses how they may be affecting the research design or outcomes" (Gall, Borg et al., 1996, p. 771). This process involved self-reflection and critical examination of my own subjective thoughts, opinions, assumptions, feelings, and biases that served to influence the study at all stages of inquiry. To assist in this process, I wrote in a research journal. I also engaged in ongoing dialogue about my research with supportive peers and my research advisor. This dialogue helped me to identify my biases and assumptions.

Patton (1990) maintains that if the findings generated from the data are consistent with the experiences of those interviewed it will add credibility to the research findings. As such, in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings

of this study, participants were each invited to review the findings derived from the interview data. Of the eight individuals who participated in the study, six provided me with feedback. Two participants asked that I make a minor change to the information that applied to their experiences. These changes were easily accommodated.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research study, the safety or well-being of the participants should be of paramount importance. In this study several steps were taken to help ensure the well-being of my participants. First, I chose to include only doctoral students who had successfully completed their degree. Doctoral students who are actively involved in their program are in a vulnerable position with respect to their role or position in a university department, that is, they still require the support of faculty to be granted their degree. An active doctoral student may not feel free to discuss openly his or her experience with others, especially as it relates to his or her negative interactions with faculty for fear of unpleasant consequences.

Second, I chose to include participants from multiple disciplines and multiple universities, rather than limit involvement to one department at one university. In part, I did so to help protect the identity of the participants as well as faculty who were named in the interviews. If I had limited inclusion to graduates of one department at one university, revealing certain information (e.g., characteristics of a faculty member), may have been sufficient to expose the identity of persons identified or involved in the study.

Third, additional steps were taken to help ensure that the identity of the participant was protected. Together with the help of each participant, a pseudonym was created and used throughout, from the transcription of the interview data to the inclusion

of any related material in the final document. Additionally, whenever possible, any other information that may have identified him or her as a participant was also removed and/or modified. On occasion, when presenting the findings, transcript information was deliberately not included because to do so would have revealed too much information about the participant and/or faculty.

Fourth, in addition to protecting the identity of the research participant, I took steps to help protect the identity of person(s) identified by the participant. Individuals were not identified by name; rather, in both the transcripts and the final document the person was identified by the role and/or relationship that he or she had in relation to the participant (e.g., supervisors' names were not used).

Fifth, prior to their involvement in the study, all participants were asked to sign a consent form. No deception was used in this study, and as such, the consent form explicitly outlined the purpose of the study, distribution of research findings, and any expectations imposed on participants should they agree to participate. Further, it was also made explicit that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and without any pressure from me. The ways in which they could withdraw as well as the time line for withdrawing (e.g., not after oral defence) were also made explicit.

Finally, all interviews were audio-recorded to be transcribed at a later date. I transcribed all of the interviews. As described earlier, no real names were used in the transcripts. All written, electronic, and audio materials were safely stored to help ensure the protection of the raw material. I was the only person to have access to the raw material; however, as it was explained in the consent to participate form, the information

was available to my dissertation supervisor, and possibly the dissertation supervisory committee.

Significance of the Study

The pursuit of a doctoral degree is a large investment of time and resources. Researchers have estimated that it requires from 7-9 to 9-11 years, after obtaining a bachelor's degree, to earn a doctoral degree (Elgar, 2003). Doctoral students, their advisor(s), and the university department all have a vested interest in ensuring the successful completion of the doctoral program. Unfortunately, however, for many disciplines, less than 50% of students successfully complete their doctoral program (Elgar, 2003). Elgar also reports that thesis-based doctoral programs produce fewer graduates, suggesting that the dissertation requirement adds additional and sometimes insurmountable difficulties for students.

Research has demonstrated that hope has a potential role to play in the dissertation process. For example, hope has been associated with academic success (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder, Harris et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002) and greater likelihood of program completion (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002). The focus of this study is on relationship factors that foster a doctoral student's hope, with the potential of shedding light on a potentially cost-neutral way to improve both completion rates and time-to-complete rates of doctoral programs. This study has the potential to offer practical information for faculty, family, and friends who wish to support doctoral students.

An Introduction to Participants

In this section, I provide information on each participant in order to get the personal context for this research. I briefly discuss his or her motivation for obtaining a

PhD, as well as expectations regarding the program and the dissertation itself. I also comment on his or her overall experiences within the program. Finally, because I allowed participants to define or describe hope for themselves, I include each participant's personal definition of hope. Care is taken to ensure that no identifying information has been included in this section. For example, demographic information was purposely excluded from their summary. Furthermore, participants were given an opportunity to review the information to ensure that it accurately represented their experience and that they were comfortable with the level of information that was included.

Eight participants, three men and five women, were interviewed for this study. All participants successfully wrote and defended a doctoral dissertation. They received their doctoral degrees from Universities in Central and Western Canada. One participant worked in education, whereas the others were practicing psychologists with varying areas of speciality. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 54 with a mean age of 42.1 years, and age of the participants did not appear relevant with respect to their descriptions or conceptualizations of hope. Participant selection and recruitment strategies did not take into consideration the ethnicity of the participants, and coincidentally all participants in this study were Caucasian. The time to complete the doctoral degree ranged from 3 to 6.5 years, with a mean of 4.5 years. The year in which degrees were granted ranged from 1993-2004, with only one participant receiving her degree in the 1990's.

Only one participant took extended time off from school while in the doctoral program, and illness was given as the reason. Sources of funding while in a doctoral program varied and most participants identified multiple sources of funding. Two participants identified receiving student loans. Six participants identified teaching

assistant positions, whereas two indicated working as a research assistant at the university. Six participants identified scholarships or research grants as a source of funding. One participant identified family support, and two participants cited employee related benefits. Finally, five participants indicated that they worked outside of a university setting while working on their doctoral degree.

David

When David began graduate school in the United States his ultimate goal was to obtain a doctoral degree. David left his U.S. school with a Master's degree, and immediately enrolled in a doctoral program at a Canadian university. David began his graduate school work with a clearly defined goal of becoming a professor within an academic institution. Upon completion of his Master's degree and prior to beginning his doctoral work, his professional goals changed. David's change in career path was a result of becoming "*disenchanted*" with the academic environment. Overall, he came to the conclusion that for him, the environment was "*too toxic*" and that he did not wish to work in such an environment.

Having had several significant negative experiences in his Master's program, David had low expectations regarding the level of support that he would receive in a doctoral program. He expected that problems would arise in his supervisory relationship - and they did. As a result of the problems he encountered with his first supervisor, David, like one other participant, chose to change his supervisor midway through his program.

David's initial goal for his dissertation was to further and disseminate knowledge related to his topic of interest. Towards the end of the process however, he did not think about the outcome, completing had become "*a means to an end*"- completing meant that

he could graduate. He wanted "*just to finish my PhD and just get it over with*". David indicated that he anticipated that the process of writing would be "*aversive*", and according to him it was. To finish, he set up tight deadlines and rules of writing for himself, which he was diligent in following.

Unlike some other participants, who reported primarily positive experiences, it appears that David's experience in graduate school was largely negative. David indicated that he understands why some people choose to leave doctoral programs prior to completion. In retrospect, David explained that if he had to do it all over, he would have chosen a different academic route, one that did not include graduate school.

David is the only participant who took extended time off during his doctoral studies. Due to illness, David's doctoral program was interrupted for about a year and a half. Although this was an extremely difficult and trying experience, David indicated that his illness helped him to remain balanced in his life while in the program. Although school was a priority for him, so too was his health. Unlike many of his classmates, David deliberately engaged in enjoyable and rewarding activities. David believes that had it not been for achieving a more balanced life as a student, he would likely have dropped out of the doctoral program.

David defined hope clearly as, "*engaging in goal directed behaviour where you anticipate that you will achieve your goal*".

Helen

Helen began her PhD program immediately upon completion of her Master's degree; however, she earned these degrees from different Canadian universities. Helen

stated that professional growth, which included career oriented skill-based learning and enhanced research ability, was central in her decision to pursue her doctoral degree.

Her expectations upon entering a doctoral program were to build upon the practical and research skills that she had acquired during her Master's. She reported that these expectations were largely unmet by her department. She did note that she did develop as a professional, not as a direct result of her academic involvement, but as a result of the practical based experiences that she had while she was a doctoral student.

During her Master's program, Helen enjoyed the academic experience. This positive experience, she hoped, would continue while she was enrolled in the doctoral program. For example, she explained that while in the Master's program she experienced a strong sense of "*community*". She hoped to continue to experience this sense of community while in the doctoral program. This expectation, according to Helen, was not met. Instead, what she experienced was a lack of departmental acknowledgement of the isolating and alienating nature of research. In addition to the lack of community, she also experienced a feeling of being unknown by others in the department: That professors, including her supervisors, considered her to be just another statistic, and did not know, or take the time to know, her as a unique person.

Prior to writing the dissertation, Helen did not think much about the final product except perhaps some of the more practical aspects of the document (e.g., length). Overall, Helen was uncertain about what was expected regarding the final document, but she was consciously aware of the evaluative nature of the dissertation, that is, that she would need to produce a document that would be sufficient to warrant approval from her supervisor and committee.

Her expectations and her actual experience regarding the writing process were similar. She expected that the process would be somewhat isolating and it was. Helen enjoyed writing and started with a confidence in her ability to write well; she therefore welcomed the challenge of the dissertation. Helen noted because she was working full time while writing the dissertation the experience was made more difficult as she struggled to find the time needed to write. Helen also noted that she encountered some unexpected difficulties because she was attempting to publish parts of her dissertation while she continued to work on the main document. This experience made the writing more difficult than she had initially anticipated because she had to write for multiple audiences with varying expectations.

Helen is the second of two participants who changed supervisors during her doctoral program. This change was the direct result of one, although drawn out, particularly negative experience that served to shatter a somewhat precarious working relationship that she had with her initial supervisor. This experience impacted her personally and, because of the departmental response to this incident, influenced her perceptions of the department as a whole. She explained that many of her future interactions with other members within the department were coloured by this one experience. Although the relationship she developed with her second supervisor was better than the first, she indicated that this relationship was not ideal.

Helen defined hope as "*anything that enables or leads, somehow leads to forward movement. It's very forward oriented for me. I think hope can, I experience it as a behaviour, as a feeling, as a, it takes on many many forms*". She also indicated that:

> *It doesn't have to be physical movement, like how productive I am or anything like that. It can also be forward moving in my feelings. So I can just sit there and*

> *veg on some feelings for a while, and if I've come to appreciate those feelings or understand them, in a way that I needed to at the time or whatever, that can be forward moving.*

She indicated that she believes that hope can fluctuate as a result of various contributing factors, big and small. She experienced the *"big"* hope-impacting moments as especially difficult to overcome, because they affected her in a *"fundamental"* way.

Helen indicated that as a result of the interview she came to appreciate the role of hope as it related to her experiences as a doctoral student. She reported that she was:

> *Amazed at what I've learned about um hope and the role of hope in my process. And how much I've learned about, you know, the pockets of hope. And it can help guide you if you take the time to reflect on that. It can really help guide you. And in some ways I wish I had done that throughout.*

Fraser

Fraser did not enter the PhD program immediately following the completion of his Master's program. Instead it was after a period in the work force that he chose to pursue a doctoral degree. Fraser initially indicated that he entered a doctoral program because it gave him a marketable skill that would offer mobility. As the interview progressed, it became clear that his reasons for getting a PhD went well beyond his initially stated objectives. It appeared that for Fraser the process of obtaining an education, including a PhD, was for him a way of fostering a better and more positive life for himself and others. According to Fraser,

> *The dissertation and the PhD program has finally put me in a place where, not materially, because I have all I wanted, but certainly from a sense of self, I'm really happy with who I am. Really comfortable with the way I treat people. I'm not a snob. I'm not arrogant. ....It has allowed me to work with people, to meet people and relate with them really well. That's what education is. Education is about having the ability to form, maintain, and really enjoy relationships. People are people. What can you do to help?*

Upon entering the doctoral program, Fraser expected to receive immediate support in the form of practical guidance and information from professors in the department. Fraser also anticipated that doctoral students would be made a priority in the department, including being given priority when enrolling in courses. These expectations were not met. Instead, Fraser indicated that there was a lot of uncertainly around procedural aspects, including registration and course selection. On some level, Fraser also expected that the department would be an environment where professional growth would be nurtured in students, that the environment would be *"warm and welcoming"*. This was not his experience.

In addition to the lack of warmth that he experienced and witnessed as it related to the departmental environment, he explained that he did not feel like he belonged within the context of his classmates and peers. Fraser stated that he did not feel comfortable in an environment where others were apparently boastful of their "*expertise*", and thus, he purposely limited his time in this environment, an environment that he perceived as a potential hindrance to succeeding.

When he began the program, he did not believe that he would complete the dissertation, instead, he believed that he would end up "*ABD*" (all but dissertation). He indicated that "*what I thought would happen was that time would expire and it just wouldn't be finished*". Upon meeting with his supervisor, this perspective shifted. He came to believe in his ability to succeed. Once he believed that he could do it, the dissertation process was no longer "*scary*". Fraser described the actual process of conducting research and writing as a "*piece of cake*" and that "*despite the working full time part, the dissertation from start to finish was probably the easiest academic activity*

I've ever done". He explained that he was excited to pursue a topic that no one had yet examined. He did and continues to like his chosen topic.

Fraser indicated that for him, hope is not about obtaining one specific identifiable goal. Instead, hope is about having, or being given, the opportunity to realize one's potential in life. Hope is also about believing in your abilities to reach this potential and in your abilities to make a difference in this world.

> *I think that hope is not, in itself, is not a goal, I think that hope is a way of life. And what comes out of it for me is the belief that you do make a difference in the world...That your presence in the world makes the world a better place. And if that's the case, by finding your gift that you bring to that world, that's what hope is.... Hope is [also] the ability to know that everything will work out as it should. And realizing your potential, or working towards your potential... means that you're, you're riding hope, you're, you've operationalized it as a lifestyle. It's not on paper anymore. It's the way you live. That's what hope is.*

Alice

Alice knew prior to beginning the Master's program that her ultimate goal was to complete a doctoral degree. She entered a doctoral program immediately following the completion of her Master's degree. When Alice began her graduate work she had a clearly defined professional goal, that is, to become a professor within an academic institution. Upon completion of her doctoral degree, Alice did not become a professor and is currently working in a clinically oriented setting. Practical considerations were noted as the reason for this career change, specifically, that there was a lack of available teaching positions in her city when she completed her degree.

Having completed her Master's degree at the same university, Alice had a clear idea about the support that she would receive during her doctoral program. First, having previously worked with her supervisor, she believed that she would receive the same level of support from him while working on her doctoral degree. She believed that he

would continue to "*fight for his students*", that is, to advocate and protect his students in a politically charged and sometimes adversarial environment – and he did. Second, Alice had hoped to and did receive financial support in the way of scholarships, teaching assistantships, and grants.

Alice explained that she purposely did not think about the process of writing the dissertation prior to beginning her doctoral work. Based on her past experience with writing her Master's and undergraduate thesis, she knew that writing a dissertation would not be an enjoyable experience for her. Although she normally enjoys writing, the structured and inflexible nature of writing research made the process a difficult and unpleasant one. Alice did not want her dissertation to be "*some great big thing that would sit on a shelf with a lot of words*", but rather, she hoped to produce an interesting and concise paper that would be publishable. She did, in fact, publish.

Alice indicated that her experience in graduate school was "*a bit of a roller coaster*". Rather than specifically questioning her abilities to complete the dissertation – which was considered just a "*part of the whole package*", she sometimes wondered about her overall ability to complete the requirements for the degree. There were times where she posed general questions to herself, questions like, "*how am I going to get through the next year or next semester*", or "*how am I going to deal with this situation*?"

For Alice, hope and personal ambition were virtually synonymous, indicating that personal ambition was a better descriptor of her experience. In defining personal ambition, she used words like, "*striving towards*" and "*attaining something for yourself*". These future directed and goal oriented terms that she uses to define personal ambition are similar to terms that others have used to describe hope. Despite the different

terminology, it is because of this similarity in definitions that I have chosen to include her experiences in this study and to examine them from a hope perspective.

The process of reflecting upon her experiences was an emotional one for Alice; this was particularly evident when she reflected upon the friendships that she had formed during her graduate work. Several years have passed since obtaining her degree, and she has since moved away from the province in which she earned her PhD. As a result of these, and perhaps other factors, the friendships that she formed while in the program have faded. It was with obvious sadness that she relayed the story of losing contact with these people, individuals with whom she had at one time been so closely connected.

Eric

Eric is the only participant who entered a PhD program for a non-professionally driven reason. Eric explicitly stated that he did not pursue a doctoral degree to meet a particular professional goal. Eric was driven to obtain a PhD largely for intrinsic reasons, including a desire for personal growth. For him, the doctoral program allowed for time away from his 20 plus year career. He viewed the pursuit of a doctoral degree as a "*Sabbath*" - "*a time of rest*".

Eric had learned about the doctoral program and his potential supervisor through a friend, who had also completed a PhD within that department. As a result of hearing about his friend's experience and meeting with his supervisor in advance of enrolling in the program, Eric had certain clear ideas regarding the level of support he would receive as a doctoral student. Eric envisioned an "*intellectual community*", a place where he could share and discuss research ideas with individuals who shared similar interests. He hoped to "*connect*" with his supervisor, a person who in addition to supporting him

directly would also foster this intellectual community. Eric indicated that although not exactly how he envisioned his experience to be, "*it was still wonderful*" for him.

Eric lived several hours away from the main campus. Although he had secured a temporary residence near campus he spent a great deal of time travelling back and forth. Because of this, Eric did not expect to make and nurture friendships while enrolled in the program. To his surprise, Eric met and developed a friendship with a woman whom he described as his "*intellectual soul mate*". This friendship remained intense throughout the course of his studies, and is often highlighted throughout the interview. This friendship was an unexpected and yet influential aspect of his experience in the doctoral program.

Eric envisioned the dissertation in a concrete way, that is, he envisioned the "*book*", which served as a symbol of his overall achievement. Although not the motivation for entering the doctoral program, Eric also indicated that he hoped that one possible outcome of having completed a dissertation would be broadened career or professional opportunities.

Eric indicated that when he began the doctoral program he did not doubt his ability to write a dissertation. Eric is, according to him, "*born to write*". He truly enjoys the experience of writing, and welcomed the challenge of the dissertation. Although Eric did not have doubts about the writing process, he had initial, but short lived, doubts about whether he could successfully complete the "*research part*" of a dissertation, that is, the systematic collection of, and writing up the research findings. Overall for him, the dissertation was and remained a "*manageable*" task and in retrospect he "*loved*" the experience. Eric remained passionate about his research from start to finish. It was also

obvious to me in our interview that, years later, he remains passionate about his chosen topic.

Throughout his time as a doctoral student, Eric did not encounter any significant hope-threatening experiences. He explained that his experience was nothing but "*wonderful*". Interestingly, he explained that when he first read a description of my study, he did not appreciate the connection between hope and the dissertation process. It seemed that he was not explicitly aware of the influence of hope in his experience. Significant here is that the process of reflecting upon his experience through the lens of hope helped to raise his awareness of the factors that contributed to creating such a positive or hopeful experience for him. For Eric, it was not that hope didn't exist, instead, until our interview, he was not overtly aware of hope. He said:

> *In some ways it was like, 'why wouldn't I be hopeful', like, like, it is sort of like a none issue. Which is why I'm glad we're talking about all this, cause as I think about it, yeah, I could have gotten really side tracked.... I think to do this kind of work, which is really big for the time you're involved with it, it can drown you, you know, so so you do need something that keeps you from being drowned.*

In hindsight, Eric came to understand that hope, as it related to the dissertation, was defined as *"energy"* and that his relationships with others were instrumental in maintaining this energy. He also defined hope as future oriented and that it involves the perception of being in control of one's life or future. According to Eric:

> *Hope is finding or experiencing or looking for, or being involved with those things that give you energy. And the energy to carry on, I guess. Energy to move into the future in a positive way instead of dragging through life....maybe for me part of the whole PhD year, the couple of years, was a time when I was really in charge of what I did.*

Kristina

Kristina indicated that she chose to return to graduate school in order to facilitate a career change. Kristina knew prior to beginning the Master's program that her ultimate goal was to complete a doctoral degree. She entered a doctoral program immediately following the completion of her Master's degree. Kristina indicated that a doctoral degree and her newly chosen profession was "*a way so I could make a good living*" and would allow her to extend her career "*into my '70's*". Kristina also cited an intrinsic desire to learn and pure enjoyment in being a student as facilitating her decision to pursue a doctoral degree upon completion of her Master's.

Having completed a Master's degree at the same university, Kristina had certain expectations regarding the type of support that she would receive. She specifically cited support from her supervisor, the person who had supervised her throughout her Master's. She envisioned a working relationship in which she would be made a priority. She also expected that her supervisor would facilitate her process of completing the program. She explained that these expectations were met.

Kristina hoped that the completed dissertation would not "*sit on a dusty shelf*", but rather, that it would be read and used by others. She hoped that her work would add to the small body of similar research, and help set a new direction of research. She hoped that other students would look to and learn from her work when conducting their own research projects. According to Kristina, these expectations were met.

Kristina envisioned that the process of writing the dissertation would be "*smoother*", "*quicker*", and "*more manageable*" than it actually was. In reality, she encountered delays, set backs, and competing demands along the way that all individually

contributed to slowing down the writing process. Kristina explained that the actual writing of her dissertation was a lonely and isolating experience, and one that was filled with personal sacrifice.

Kristina experienced "*peaks and valleys*" throughout the process - times where she was progressing nicely and times where she felt "*stuck*". When experiencing the "*valleys*" she always had an awareness of hope. For Kristina, hope is "*the expectation of a positive future*", and therefore she believed that the "*valleys were temporary*", that she would move beyond that difficult experience.

When reflecting back on her experiences, especially on how others impacted her hope during difficult times, tears began to develop in her eyes. It appeared that even years after the incidents occurred, Kristina is still touched by the support and kindness that she received from others. Overall, Kristina indicated that she is glad to have completed a doctoral program, but she would "*never want to do it again*".

Susan

Susan indicated that when she entered graduate school she had specific career objectives. She entered the doctoral program immediately upon completing her Master's degree to further these professional objectives.

Having completed her Master's degree at the same university, Susan had certain beliefs about the level of support she would receive, namely that she would be assured financial assistance throughout her time in the program. She did receive this financial support. She had also believed that her experience as a doctoral student would be similar to that as a Master's student, that is, *"reasonably smooth"*, with a reasonably supportive supervisor and not many "*hassles.*" Unfortunately, this was not her experience. She

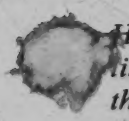
encountered significant barriers to completion. Susan is the only participant in this study who, after working for two years on one topic, switched research topics. Although interested in her first topic, her second study became a *"means to an end"*, and completing the doctoral program was her only expected outcome of the study.

Susan had the same supervisor for her Master's thesis and dissertation work. She did not encounter any significant difficulties with her supervisor during her Master's program; however she did note that their approach to conducting research did not match well. Although she continued to work with the same supervisor, in retrospect, she wishes she would have chosen a supervisor who would have been more supportive of her applied interests.

Overall, Susan also described the process of conducting and writing the dissertation as much more emotionally difficult than she had anticipated. She explained that there were periods of time where she became quite unmotivated to work on her research. She stated that because of the anxiety and stress associated with the process, she developed a type of *"learned helplessness"*, and an avoidant or *"phobic"* response to her research. Susan also noted that her personality changed because of her experiences in the doctoral program. She reported that others, in particular, her husband, noticed this change in her. Having witnessed her experience first hand, she reported that her husband said that should they have children, he would have concerns if they decided to attend graduate school. It appeared that reflecting on her experiences for the purpose of this interview caused some old feelings to resurface. For example, when she was describing the details of one particular incident she began to cry. Although she chose to share this incident with

me, this incident is something that Susan said she does not normally talk about with others because it is too difficult for her.

Susan had some difficulty articulating her definition of hope, and said:



> *How do you define hope? I don't know. [pause]. I guess technically it is sort of like a wish for something. I mean a really strong wish for something. But also I think it's got to do with that belief....if you don't believe in yourself, um, it would be very, you wouldn't have very much hope I don't think.*

In reflecting upon her experience Susan noted that she had periods of time when she wondered whether she should continue, where she asked herself, *"can I do this?"*. Despite these thoughts, she obviously did succeed. Although she was never consciously aware of hope throughout the process, she believed that hope was an underlying factor in her ability to be successful. As indicated in her definition of hope, hope and confidence in her abilities are intimately connected for her. She began the doctoral program with a large reservoir of self-confidence, and that although significant experiences chipped away at her confidence, she had enough left to draw upon to succeed. As it related to hope, Susan reported that:

> *I always had hope that I would finish. And I had a certain amount of confidence that it would happen, that reserve really declined at times, and it almost disappeared at times but I don't think it ever fully did. You know. I always had that, you know, I don't know how, but some way it would happen.*

Wanda

Wanda returned to graduate school to facilitate a career change after becoming disillusioned in her first career. For her, the world of academics was the place to renew her passion and excitement in life with respect to professional enthusiasm. Wanda's initial goal when entering graduate school was to obtain a Master's degree, stating, "*I never really had any intentions of doing a PhD*" She described "*stumbling*" into the

doctoral program, having been influenced to do so by her Master's supervisor. Although motivated by professional objectives, Wanda's professional goals were not clearly defined.

Having completed a Master's degree at the same university, Wanda had certain expectations regarding the type of support that she would receive, specifically citing support from her supervisor and fellow students who were going through the same process. She did, in fact, receive this support. When working on her Master's degree she did not spend much time in her department, however, during her doctoral work, she was more present in the department. This brought with it surprising sources of support, namely in the form of support staff. She explained that the presence of the support staff "*kind of [made] you feel warm being around there*" that they facilitated a "*sense of belonging*". In this respect, her experience exceeded her initial expectations.

Two unmet expectations were noted. First, she had hoped to work in a collaborative or team-like fashion with her supervisor and fellow students (i.e., research team). Second, she had hoped to establish a mentorship like relationship with her supervisor, a relationship that would stretch the boundaries of her learning. Because her supervisor was largely unfamiliar with her research area, this expectation, like the first, was not met.

Wanda described that her initial hopes regarding the outcome of her dissertation as "*idealistic*". She explained that she had hoped the outcome of her dissertation would be "*earth shattering*", that is, that she would do unique and meaningful work that would produce tangible results for her population of interest. Eventually, this ambitiousness regarding the outcome was replaced with a desire to "*just be done*", to produce a

document that would be sufficient to warrant approval from her examining committee. She came to believe that she was just "*one of many*", that "*I'm just a cog. I'm just a cog working through a machine, jumping over hurdles. I'm not more than that.*" This change appeared to be a result of several factors, all of which were related to emotionally chipping away at her resolve. Included in these factors was her increased professional involvement with her population of interest and, more specifically, the perception that the problem was too great and that her research could do little to help. Also included in these factors was that the process of writing the dissertation had been more difficult than she had initially anticipated.

Wanda indicated that her process of writing the dissertation was like a pendulum. She started out idealistic and enthusiastic about research in general, and more specifically about her chosen topic. Later, these positive emotions were replaced with feelings of isolation and loneliness, self-doubt and self-criticism, depression, and cynicism. Finally, as she approached the end, she became more of a "*realist*" understanding that her work had meaning, although perhaps not as "*earth shattering*" as she had first anticipated. This shift in perspective as well as approaching the end of her writing was also associated with a renewed, although perhaps more tempered, sense of enthusiasm to complete the project. Wanda indicated that in retrospect, had she known, prior to making the decision to enter a doctoral program, how difficult the process would be she is uncertain as to whether she would have decided to pursue the doctoral degree.

Wanda indicated that while reflecting on her experience she was somewhat surprised at the subtle nature of the sources of hope. Wanda had difficulty generating a concise definition of hope, but indicated that for her, hope is about taking an "*I can*"

perspective. Hope is a belief - a "*belief in the future*" and in "*possibilities*". Hope, rather than being "*good*" or "*bad*", is about her ability to "*take on a challenge*" or being "*more receptive to opportunities*" as they arise for her.

Throughout the course of our interview, there was an obvious shift in the mood or tone of our conversation. At the beginning the mood was light-hearted and Wanda spoke quickly and in great detail. There was an obvious shift that occurred when Wanda began to talk about her writing process and her perceptions about the value of her work. It appeared that our conversation had caused her to revisit some painful feelings. At this time, Wanda became more silent, more reflective. Although she began the interview with the ability to easily articulate herself, during this time, she noted that she was finding it difficult to find the words to describe her experience. Wanda also noted that she was appreciative to have had the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss her experience, indicating that in some ways, it was a therapeutic experience for her.

> *You know what it almost, you know, it almost feels like, like, it just gave me chance to put some stuff - I don't know. I just, you end your dissertation. You walk out of your defence. You submit everything. You get it bound and you walk away. And you never really talk about it. You never work through that experience. You never reflect on it. You never do these kinds of things. So it just all sits there. It's almost like I feel now like I didn't just bind the writing - it's like binding the experience, and finding a place for it. [pause] You do all that learning and never really get a chance to learn from it. I don't know. Everyone should have to do this [interview]. Interesting. It's very interesting.*

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings

Throughout our conversations, participants identified several hope-impacting moments that occurred within the context of their relationships with others. The eight participants identified 34 separate persons with whom they had hope-impacting interactions. In relaying their experiences, participants either summarized their overall experience with someone or identified multiple distinct encounters with one person. When participants summarized their overall experience with one person, they were able to clearly identify at least one salient moment that occurred which highlighted their experiences with this person. Each of these relationships was examined for their hope-impacting influences or dynamics.

The findings in this section are presented with partiality of point of view, that is, they describe the experiences solely from the perspective of the participants and make no attempt to represent the experiences of others (e.g., supervisors). The findings are divided into two main segments. The first section describes the dynamics of the relationships that help to engender hope in students. The second section explores the hope-reducing elements of relationships.

With respect to qualities of hope-engendering relationships, two themes emerged. These themes were generated from the six categories and 16 subcategories that were identified (see Table 1). With respect to hope-threatening relationships or interactions, one main theme emerged. This theme was generated from the two categories and five subcategories that were identified (see Table 2 page 113). The themes were generated by

reducing the data by first grouping related subcategories into categories, and then related categories into themes.

Hope-Fostering Themes

Table 1: Hope-Fostering Themes

SUBCATEGORIES	CATEGORIES	THEMES
Starts at the Beginning Working Alongside Respect Protector	PARTNERSHIP	ALLIANCE
Genuineness Consistency Dependability	SAFETY AND COMFORT	
Shared Interest Shared Experiences	CONNECTEDNESS	
Encouragement Confidence Avoidance	ATTENDING TO EMOTION	RESPONSIVE TO STUDENTS' NEEDS
Creativity Challenge Growth	ATTENDING TO INTELLECT	
Advice Facilitating	ATTENDING TO PRAGMATIC	

The presentation of the findings is as follows. First, each theme is identified and briefly described, including naming each of the categories that make up the theme. Second, each category is discussed, including a detailed description of each of the subcategories that make up the category. When illustrative, and when anonymity can be assured, I have included excerpts from the transcript.

Alliance

The first theme, "Alliance" relates specifically to the qualities within the relationships that doctoral students have with others. Hope is nurtured or exists within the context of these types of relationships. It is important to note that these are the qualities that serve as the foundation for the second theme, "Responsiveness to Students' Needs". The second theme will be discussed in greater detail following a thorough exploration of the first theme. Three hope-fostering categories have been identified in this theme; they are, "Partnership", "Safety and Comfort", and "Connectedness".

Partnership.

The category "Partnership" represents the type of working relationships that students have with others. These relationships, as described by participants, are shown to exist exclusively with others in the academic realm, including, but not limited to, peers, supervisory committee members, and supervisors. Highlighted in this section are key aspects of supervisory relationships, that is, unique qualities within these relationships that are not found in any other relationships identified by most participants. Overall, this category represents the *way* people come together to work together towards a common goal, that is, the completion of the dissertation.

"Starts at the Beginning"

Interestingly, some participants indicated that the ability to work under the supervision of a particular person could be a powerful hopeful experience in and of itself. For some participants viewed the mere act of a professor agreeing to supervise a student as a powerful experience. It represented possibility and opportunity. Participants were grateful that someone had provided them with a chance to pursue their research interests

and reach their academic goals. For participants securing a supervisor generated feelings of excitement, energy, motivation, determination, and relief. This was an experience that only a supervisor could provide and it represented an experience that triggered hope. As described by Fraser, "*She really didn't want to take anybody else on. I knew that she had turned down students prior to that and I felt really um, fortunate at the time to hear her say 'okay, let's do it'*". Similarly, Eric reported:

> *One of my moments was before I actually started... I had emailed her [supervisor] and said "I'm thinking of doing a PhD could I come and talk to you". So she gave me a couple of hours...I remember clearly... I remember just being so, excited and so ready, you know, because of that conversation with [supervisor]... You know, like the other question was "do you think you'll have room for another student in a about a year?" "Yes, she would probably have room for a student" and "Yes, she would be happy to take me"... So that was really the day probably when I said, "yeah. I'm going to do this."*

Other people or interactions along the way then sustain this initial hopeful energy, which Fraser eloquently called the *"chain of hope"*.

"Working Alongside"

People who were identified here were those in a position of authority and/or in a position to offer something of significance to most of the participants as it related to facilitating completion. It was the supervisor who was most often identified as a key player in this process; however "Working Alongside" was also noted to occur with others, including, but not limited to, former supervisors and members of supervisory committees.

Within these supportive or hope-engendering relationships participants believed that others had an eagerness or genuine desire to help students reach their goals. Participants felt that the support and guidance provided was not self-serving, but rather

freely offered without expectations that these deeds would be reciprocated. Participants felt supported, valued, and important. As described by Fraser:

> *That's how you give hope. You give people the opportunity to become what they need to become And it's not about special favours, because nothing was ever asked in return by [supervisor] or any people that helped. It was a case of, "we're in a position to give you what you need to get where you want to be with life."*

Important others were viewed as demonstrating a genuine caring for the project. There was a perception that both members of the *team* were dedicated to working together towards a common goal. Significant here, as it related to the supervisory relationship was that the supervisor was seen as flexible and non-oppressive. Rather than imposing *the way* onto the participant, there was a perceived desire to help draw upon the participant's own internal resources and strengths. As described by Eric:

> *I always thought that she was the best example of great, of being a great teacher. She helped me to figure out what I think I know in my head. But never sort of saying, 'you have to do it this way'. But it would be, "I'm wondering about that too?" Or "oh I think you might look at this other side." So it always felt like it was still about me figuring out my topic and how I wanted to present it. It was never about her telling me what the topic was or what my work was... it always felt like it was me leading the process. So it was my research.*

As described by participants, the team-like relationship was not oppressive, instead participants' thoughts and ideas were valued and respected, and they were encouraged to have ownership of their work. Participants were encouraged to find and use their voice, including in their written work, without unnecessary interference. Participants were encouraged to be themselves in an environment of "*sameness*", an environment in which individual differences seemed to be ignored. Participants were encouraged to pursue personally meaningful or unique topics, in various ways, even if

doing so meant that they pursued research topics or methods that were not was customary within the academic department.

Team-like relationships also allowed for collaboration and when difficulties arose for participants the issue of collaborative discussions with important others became especially important. Although supervisors and supervisory committee members played key roles in this process, academic peers also served an important role, either in the absence of supportive supervisory relationships or in conjunction with them. Participants described actively engaging in problem solving or solution focused discussions. Participants were invited to propose solutions, to express concerns, and to articulate their needs. A collaborative environment in which issues and concerns are clarified and addressed was important to enhancing hope. Participants viewed these discussions as productive and constructive in that they helped to gain clarity and get "unblocked". These discussions were energizing and helped to sustain motivation. These discussions also engendered confidence that their efforts would be rewarded with academic success. These discussions, and the resulting emotional experience, helped to foster hope, that is, they allowed participants to remain forward moving and goal directed. In describing her experience, Kristina stated that:

> *They were always positive feelings. And it's like, a thankful feeling - of taking me out from under this dark cloud of confusion and detail - and it was just like an uplifting. So that dark cloud was no longer over my head and I could kind of see the light. And so it felt really positive. Really, like I could go ahead and re-think things in a clearer way...And so that made me feel like, "yeah, I can get this done."*

"Respect"

In this supportive, guiding, non-oppressive, collaborative atmosphere, participants felt respected. Pertinent to the supervisory relationship, creating this type of atmosphere

was viewed as a means to enhance participants' respect for their supervisor. According to many participants, hope existed within the context of a mutually respectful relationship. When mutual respect existed participants were more willing to listen to the advice or guidance provided to them by their supervisor. Participants were more committed to meeting the deadlines that supervisors suggested. When participants respected their supervisors they wanted to work hard *for* them so as to not disappoint. Their intrinsic desire to succeed was matched only by their desire to please their supervisors. Eric stated:

> *You imagine, you know, in the academia of old, where this advisor is going to be really mean, and is going to, you know, make you do this stuff and yell at you. Like she didn't have to be that kind of person, but I really didn't want to disappoint her. And when she said, "for next week read these papers and talk about, and we'll talk about them on Tuesday" - like I would do it.*

Similarly, Wanda indicated:

> *I think I wanted to do good by her. I think I wanted to make her look good. I think I wanted to be good for her because I liked her. I think I wanted to be good for [supervisor] because I liked her. I really like [supervisor] and I respected her.*

Participants noted that in this context of mutual respect between student and supervisor, reciprocity was also established. Participants were aware of and attended to supervisors' efforts on their behalf. Participants' respect for their supervisors was enhanced when the supervisor was viewed as working hard on behalf of the participants. Participants were careful not to exploit or misuse this gift, but rather, worked hard to demonstrate appreciation largely through the form of increased commitment and productivity. According to Kristina:

> *I was aware of how much extra effort she was going through. And I think um, that also upped my appreciation and more careful use of her time from then on too. So it made me try in a way, I suppose it did, extra hard not to give her something that was a half-baked next chapter.*

"Protector"

Participants described the departmental environment or atmosphere in a variety of ways; however the most predominate view did not present university departments in a positive light. All participants' reflections upon departmental conditions often occurred spontaneously throughout the course of the interviews, and overall, their observations ranged from somewhat neutral to exceedingly negative. Although the departments met some of the practical and financial needs of some participants, participants noted a lack of structure and consistency in their treatment of students and requirements for completion of the degree, leading to the perception that unnecessary hurdles or burdens were imposed on students. The perception was that new and innovative ideas were discouraged in favour of maintaining the "*status quo*", where completion statistics appeared more important than individual success. The atmosphere of a university department was described by participants as "*a fight*", "*a war*", "*a battle*", "*swimming with the sharks*", "*political*", "*toxic*", "*abusive*", "*nauseating*", "*inhumane*", "*demoralizing*", and "*impoverished*", where students get "*exploited*", "*tortured*", "*treated like crap*", and made to "*jump through hoops*". Successfully obtaining a doctoral degree, according to participants, required the ability to survive under these harsh conditions.

In this environment, the relationship between supervisor and student was viewed as crucial. The supervisor was in the unique position to act as student advocate or protector within the larger departmental context. Some participants valued the protection offered to them by supervisors and viewed it as an important element in their ability to succeed and to sustain hope under seemingly harsh conditions. Protection occurred when supervisors actively intervened to prevent an injustice from occurring or when they

advocated for the participant's work. Furthermore, a participant's alliance with a well-respected supervisor was also viewed as a form of protection. This protection afforded participants the opportunity to work towards achieving their academic goals with the least complications – hope was fostered because protection facilitated goal attainment. This protection as described by Alice:

> *Part of his role as advisor, supervisor, he took as kind of fighting for his students, his graduate students, so they didn't get you know, they didn't get the bad end of any politics at the graduate school level.....I mean the politics can get pretty serious at university so if you don't have anybody looking out for you, I think you can be in big trouble pretty quickly.*

Safety and Comfort.

The second category, "Safety and Comfort", describes the qualities of the relationships that enhance students' comfort with the others. Trust is inherent in this category. Many participants viewed the atmosphere within the relationship as a place where one felt supported and free to be oneself. Hope exists in a relationship of safety and comfort. Within the context of "safety and comfort" one is free to display vulnerabilities and weaknesses. Participants described an increased willingness to talk about their research process, which, by itself was viewed as hopeful, that is, talking about the research helped to maintain goal directed behaviour. The subcategories that are included in this category include; "Genuineness" "Consistency", and "Dependability".

"Genuineness"

Participants often characterized hope-fostering relationships or interactions as a "Genuine". Some participants highlighted the real nature of the relationship with others, including professors, peers, and individuals outside of the academic realm. As it related to professors, academia is an environment where there is an inherent power differential

between students and professors. When there was a genuine relationship, participants saw the power differential as minimized. Participants believed that their supervisors viewed them as an equal partner in the relationship. Participants did not feel anxious, on guard, or nervous in the relationship.

With respect to relationships with peers, although there is no inherent power differential within relationships, because graduate school can be an environment where there is overt or covert competition between students, there exists the potential to impede the development of genuine relationships. Many participants who were able to develop genuine relationships with peers highlighted these relationships as essential, especially in the absence of a positive and supportive relationship with supervisors.

Outside of the academic realm, students can develop intimate relationships with supportive others, including partners or parents. It was often within the safety of relationships that many participants described being able to truly be themselves and hope to continue the dissertation process was fostered. For example, family members of participants were often in a position to witness, firsthand, their struggles and offer words of encouragement.

Overall, no matter if the relationship was with professors, peers, or family, participants noted that when the relationship was a genuine one, it was characterized as two *people* coming together in a *real* way. A message of acceptance was conveyed and hope was fostered. Participants were seen as whole or unique people and not just another *statistic.* According to Wanda:

> *I felt the, um, my relationship with her was unique. That she saw me as unique....I think that maybe she just had this way of interacting with people that made them feel that way... I really think, contrary to popular opinion that a lot of academia is being [the] same and similar and you do things the right way, I felt like she saw*

> *me as not just another one, another number out there, another whatever -she saw me as unique and she fostered that and encouraged it, and um, and and gave me the strength to be that.*

In these relationships, participants felt comfortable displaying vulnerabilities, including discussing their uncertainties or areas of confusion, and feelings of apprehension and fear. The expectation was not that others would coddle and accommodate them; instead, within the context of a genuine relationship important others may be called upon to be painfully honest with the student. As articulated by Wanda:

> *And then she'd [supervisory committee member] sometimes give me the kind of the "get over it" stuff too. Which was good too... It was like she doesn't think I'm so fragile that I'm going to break or whatever. She'll call it as she sees it with me, and I like that. And it tells me that she has enough respect for me to say that, if she didn't care she wouldn't say it. She wouldn't bother. She wouldn't waste her time. Right? She wouldn't waste her energy.*

I believe that care should be taken when providing this type of feedback to students. In my opinion, if this feedback is provided in the absence of an "Alliance", it may serve to further damage the relationship, and thus be a threat to hope.

"Consistency"

The subcategory "Consistency" involves being consistent about how others, especially those within the academic realm, present to, or interact with, the doctoral student. For example, in hopeful interactions, some participants perceived others as consistently supportive, consistently friendly, consistently positive, consistently helpful, and consistently available. This point was succinctly articulated by Kristina who noted that her supervisor was, "*always consistent in working in a positive supportive mode. Yeah. The consistency I think, stands, stands tall.*"

Hope was seen as enhanced when others, especially supervisors, were consistent with respect to the guidance or direction that was given to the participant. When

participants were provided with consistent guidance or feedback (e.g., editorial comments, procedural issues) they learned to trust their supervisors. Participants learned that they would not be given different direction in future meetings or discussions. With this reassurance, participants were less likely to second-guess themselves or the advice, and were more willing to follow the direction given. Due to a combination of the positive qualities of these interactions and their consistent nature, safety and comfort were enhanced, as participants knew what to expect in interactions.

"Dependability"

The subcategory "Dependability" is also a key aspect of the "Safety and Comfort" category. Some participants explained that hope was fostered when they knew that there was someone that they could depend on. The subcategory is categorized by the participant's confidence that someone would be available if he or she required support. There was someone in the participant's life who conveyed a message that they were always available when needed by the participant and that they would see them to completion. Both Kristina and Wanda articulate this point. When talking about her supervisor, Kristina reported, "*That old saying, 'she walked the talk' on that one. Where um, it was very evident that she was totally there as a support. There was no question in my mind, ever, that she would be there to see me through.*" Whereas Wanda, in talking about her former Master's supervisor and member of her dissertation supervisory committee, stated, "*My greatest support came from, um, she [former supervisor] was definitely one of my greatest supporters all the way to the end, all the way to the end. I hold her up as a real champion. Like she was, she was fantastic.*"

Students may develop these relationships with academic peers, supervisors, members of a supervisory committee, and/or family members. In all cases, others made themselves available to the participant. This was demonstrated in several ways. For example, for some participants, dependability was demonstrated when supervisors were willing to established regular meeting times with them. For others, holding sporadic but appropriately timed meetings (e.g., during difficult times for students) was a way in which supervisors demonstrated dependability. For others, it was the knowing that if they needed to, they could call someone and this person would make time for them. The issue was less about the regularity of these contacts and more about being available to the student. Participants knew that in the context of these dependable relationships, should they require assistance, whether pragmatic or emotional, there was always someone who would be there to offer this support. In this atmosphere of dependable support, participants felt as though their needs and well-being had been made a priority. These relationships were seen as enhancing hope as they helped students remain motivated, forward moving and goal directed.

Connectedness.

Participants noted that hope-fostering relationships were characterized by a feeling of "Connectedness". The category "Connectedness" speaks to the aspects that bond the student with others. The two subcategories that make up this category include; "Shared Experiences" and "Shared Interests". Overall, individuals identified in this category included those within the academic realm, that is, individuals who were currently and/or had been involved in doctoral level work.

"Shared Experiences"

"Shared Experiences" was viewed as experiences that could only occur with others who have had doctoral school experiences or who were enrolled in a doctoral program. These experiences occurred most often within relationships with peers, although not exclusively. Many participants believed that hope existed within the context of these relationships, as there was a sense of connectedness, belongingness, or camaraderie that occurred within these relationships. In these relationships there was a spoken or unspoken understanding that developed. Participants used these relationships to talk about their experiences, including venting frustrations or discussing negative events related to their involvement in a doctoral program.

Many participants explained that there was a therapeutic value to talking about these experiences with someone who *knows*. Through these discussions participants' experiences were validated and normalized. Participants became more accepting or tolerant of their experiences. Participants gained advice and clarity with respect to how to handle potentially difficult situations. Participants also became more accepting of the self, that is, self-criticism and self-doubt were reduced. Negative thoughts about the dissertation were sometimes replaced with a perception that the document was manageable – that there was hope. As stated by Wanda:

> *The friends I had who were going through the process were also a big part of it. Because they knew, they're like, "yeah yeah". And sometimes I know I'd go out or whatever, and commiserate. And it's like, I'm not alone. I'm not the only one feeling this way. That was really significant to me. Even to know that I'm not the only one who went through down times, and felt really blue....it was real validation...There are people who are going through this too, or feeling this kind of stress or feeling this kind of uncertainty are doubting themselves and their work. And, in fact, there was nobody I talked to who wasn't in some way feeling those kind of things. And I, it made me feel very normal and very human, and very okay about that. So that helped me to be a little more accepting of it too.*

"Shared Interests"

The second subcategory "Shared Interests" explores the hope-enhancing value associated with the opportunity to engage in research related activities with others who have a shared interest in research. This too was an experience of hope that most often occurred within the context of an academic environment (e.g., peers, supervisors). Unique to this subcategory was the inclusion of individuals from the larger research community, including encounters (e.g., discussions, acceptance of submitted papers for publication) with those who are considered experts in the particular area of study.

Some participants who were actively pursing research felt a sense of connectedness to others who shared their research interests or who shared their particular approach to research. The opportunity to discuss this shared interest had both practical and emotional consequences. For example, according to participants, these discussions helped to generate research topics and clarify areas of confusion. These discussions also helped participants remain forward focused and goal directed. They helped to sustain energy, motivation, and interest in the research topic. Finally, these discussions helped to increase feelings of enjoyment and decrease feelings of isolation. According to Alice:

> *It was a social process um to an extent. But it was a very um, selective social process. It was more discussion with my advisor and ...my peers. So we had discussions that would get wilder and wilder the more beer we drank.... So I guess that would be, if there was any fun parts, it would be those discussions....*

As it related to encounters with individuals from the larger research community, participants felt accepted as credible researchers with the ability to make valued contributions to the research. As a result of these interactions with individuals who had shared interests, participants reported a sense of connection to a community – something larger than themselves. These encounters either occurred in person or via email, and

despite the modality, participants reported increased feelings of hope as a result of the interactions. Helen's experience, as it related to an encounter she had with experts in the field elucidates this point. Helen stated:

> *I had presented a couple of posters to [name of conference] and um, several people approached me, big names in the field, so I had like [1st name] coming up to me and going, "wow, are you writing this up? And if so, are you going to send it to us?" And I was like, "okay" and then I had another, I got approached by um, [2nd name] who was working with [3rd name] , and then, um, [3rd name] who was the editor for another journal, where one of my papers ended up getting accepted...So I was approached and that that was very positive for me and very inspiring and motivational and really you know, lit a fire under me. Because it was like "wow, this is getting accepted by the, the community who is saying "we're interested - "write this up we want to hear all about it'". And I was like "wow, there's there's an audience for this". Which felt a lot less alienating or isolating as well.*

Responsiveness to Students' Needs

The second theme is "Responsiveness to Students' Needs". This theme reflects the fact that within relationships, the needs of a doctoral student are made a priority. The helpful or facilitating actions of others were intended solely for the participant's benefit, and did not need to be reciprocated by the participant. This theme does not address the qualities of the relationship as in the first theme, but rather, it speaks to what is *given* by another *to* the student. The first theme "Alliance" interacts with the second theme, "Responsiveness to Students' Need". It appears that being responsive to students needs must occur within the context of a strong alliance in order to effectively foster student hope. The categories identified in this theme include; "Attending to Emotion", "Attending to Intellect", and "Attending to Pragmatic".

Attending to Emotion.

Most participants acknowledged that the academic experience was often an emotionally difficult one. While enrolled in a doctoral program, participants encountered

difficult and sometimes overwhelming emotional experiences, whether directly or indirectly related to the actual academic environment. For some, difficult personal experiences occurred outside of the academic realm. For others, the academic or departmental environment itself brought with it difficult or overwhelming struggles. Compounding these experiences was the actual experience of writing the dissertation, which had been described by some participants as an experience that over time chipped away at hope.

In describing these moments it was clear that, for some participants, reflecting back on their experience in the doctoral program triggered feelings that had been dormant for a while. It was often with strong emotion that these participants described their experiences. The following statements elucidate the emotional experience of some doctoral students:

The experience as described by Kristina:

> *It's a downer. You know. There are definitely times when I think, "oh, it's so much work". And [daughter] would get mad and say, "you know, you never spend any time with me anymore mom", and so there's all the guilt trips going on. And no social life at all. ...For months... me and the computer... So it was very lonely.*

As described by David:

> *I think that for me, because I had that illness, and then really had to take time off. And that was very painful. It was very very hard. It felt like really, I felt like everything, I lost everything. And then I had to go back. And then start again. And I'm finding another advisor. And it was really, it was really hard, it was really hard.*

As described by Susan:

> *I actually got to the point where...I didn't even want to go into the room where the computer was. Um, and I started to get, not a panic attack, but sort of a stress response...that was hard....You have no time to yourself. You always feel like you should be working on it. You never feel like you are able to fully relax. And if*

> *you're not working on it and are enjoying yourself, you can't fully enjoy yourself because you feel like you should be doing it...And I wouldn't say I was depressed but I was stressed a lot.*

And finally, as described by Wanda:

> *Well, I went through a period where I just, I drove him [husband] crazy. And the kids too. I snapped at people. I was angry. And, again, hindsight, I think I was probably a little depressed.... I think I was depressed. I really do because I couldn't sleep well at night. I was waking up and, I'd wake up worrying, "I'm not going to get it done and everyone gonna think I'm a failure and I couldn't do this, da da da". And I'd wake up again saying "why am I wasting my time? I need to be doing better things. I'm too selfish. I'm just doing this for the, I'm just doing it for the prestige. I want the PhD and I want to look important and show people I can do it. It's not about the people at all...And you're selfish." Oh yeah. Really brutal. It was horrible actually.* [and] *... I think through this process when I was tired and I was frustrated with the seemingly uselessness of it all, I think I was lonely. I think I was really lonely and isolated.*

Whatever the cause, participants experienced critical moments throughout the process where feelings of isolation, stress, and self-doubt were paramount. During these critical periods, participants were left with an overwhelming sense they could not or should not move forward. It was difficult to draw upon their internal resources to continue. This desire to stop was not due to lack of knowledge or poor academic ability, but rather, it was related to the participant's emotional experience. Participants described a depletion of energy and/or lack of motivation required to continue - hope became threatened. When examined in this context, attending to the students' emotional experience becomes an important and often essential ingredient in the successful pursuit of a doctoral degree. Three subcategories make up this category; they are, "Encouragement", "Confidence" and "Avoidance". Specifically, attending to emotion may involve acknowledging the student's struggles, providing emotional words of encouragement, conveying a message of belief in the student's abilities, or providing for opportunities away from the stress of the dissertation.

"Encouragement"

Whether through direct communication or via email, all participants felt hopeful after receiving supportive words of encouragement from others. The timing of these words appeared critical and seemed to have the most impact during particularly emotionally difficult times. Supportive others appeared attuned to the participant's emotional state and were responsive to the student's need for encouragement. As articulated by Wanda when talking about her former Master's supervisor and member of her dissertation supervisory committee:

> *She got me through, she really got me through...I went through the dark time, or after the dark time or whatever I call it...it was so prominent, the things that she would say to me, the comments she would make – little bits of encouragement or the things that I felt switched me around...she still stands out really strong, clearly as someone who encouraged me.*

These words of encouragement foster hope. They provide the student with renewed energy or motivation. As described by Susan,

> *It [the dissertation] is like you're running a race.... You're running a long race and having someone at the end, you know, you're sort of dying, and there is someone there that just sort of motivating, when you hear that voice or whatever, and you just kind of pick up and get more steam.*

Upon hearing or reading these words, participants became refocused or goal-directed and began again to engage in behaviours that were directed towards completion of the dissertation with a renewed dedication.

Providing participants with an opportunity to reflect on the progress that they had made was also a source of encouragement. When participants were reminded of their gains, they felt more hopeful that they would succeed. Helen described the benefits of this experience by relaying a particular encounter with her supervisor.

> *She'd say that a lot "you've come a long way". You know and it would be like, "really?" And so she provided opportunities for us to re-visit or just kind of look back as well.... Sometimes when we're so forward moving we kind of lose sight of where we've been... So, she had a way of bringing that about...where you know, you just walk away with a little bit of a glow going, "Yeah, I I did do that – and that is a lot."*

"Confidence"

Throughout the dissertation process participants reported experiencing times of uncertainty – that is, uncertainty about whether completing the dissertation was possible. It appeared that during these times, many participants borrowed from the confidence that others had in them. There seemed to be two aspects to confidence. First, there was the level of confidence that participants had in their own academic abilities. Second, the level of confidence that participants had about whether they would actually complete the dissertation. Unlike the former, it appeared that the latter may wax and wane throughout the process of working on the dissertation.

Although peers can play a part in this area, it seemed that it is within the context of relationships with professors, particularly supervisors and members of the supervisory committee, that the message of confidence, when conveyed, was particularly salient. Some participants reported that hope was fostered in relationships where others conveyed their *unwavering* belief in their ability to complete the dissertation: Relationships in which thoughts of the alternative (i.e., failure) were never entertained or discussed. When describing his relationship with his supervisor, Fraser said:

> *There was never a question in her mind that I could do. There was none. There was no discussion that "I can't do it" and "It was just a case of, honestly, just "let's do this - let's just get it done". And it was nothing except the belief that "okay, it will be done."... she was able to just allow me to say, "so I can do this", and I left with just a sense of confidence that "yeah, I I did have what it took to engage in that process.*"

Similarly, Wanda when talking about her former Master's supervisor and member of her dissertation supervisory committee stated:

> *And so I think she convinced me not only that I would get done, without even ever saying, "you're going to get through this"... I never felt she had a single doubt. Never did. Yeah. I never thought that she was disillusioned or that she thought that I was some kind of brilliant whatever, but I honestly felt that she had no doubt that I could do it - that I could get through it.*

Some participants reported that it in these relationships they were continuously reminded of their strengths and not their weaknesses. Within these supportive relationships participants grew strong, and self-doubt was replaced by an increased belief in themselves and their academic abilities. Participants were instilled with a confidence that they would complete their dissertation regardless of any future struggles that they may face in the process. With this new or renewed self-confidence participants were motivated to continue to work hard to complete the dissertation.

"Avoidance"

Attending to emotion can also provide a doctoral student with an opportunity to avoid talking or thinking about his or her research or school/departmental problems. Highlighted in this subcategory are relationships that participants had with non-academic others. These relationships and encounters were viewed by some as a temporary reprieve or escape from the school environment. These relationships served an important protective function as they were seen as a means to assisting in maintaining the participants' overall well-being. They prevented participants from becoming "*consumed*" by their work and helped to maintain "*sanity*" throughout the difficult process of writing a dissertation. These relationships were viewed as energy giving - an opportunity to

recharge or restore one's energy reserve. When talking about her temporary reprieve, Helen stated:

> *But I did acknowledge like, "you know what. I just need to know that I can go to that person's house. I can go to his house and just have a hug. I can go to his house and just veg and watch t.v.". He was the thing that was totally unaffiliated in every way shape or form from the mess I was going through... I guess I can call it, I don't know, safe. It was a place where you just, "Wow. I can just avoid my school problems for the rest of the evening with this person". And for some reason that became very very important... Escape. Avoid - if you will. But make no mistake I was back in it the very next day. But, you would just, I would just look forward to that time where I could hop on the bus and go to his place and not have to think about it for a while.*

Similarly, when with talking about the work and his relationship with his partner, Eric reported:

> *I think to do this kind of work, which is really big for the time you're involved with it, it can drown you. You know. So you do need something that keeps you from being drowned. And so my family life, you know, my personal life, was another thing that I've always really valued and we try to keep that separate from our work lives.*

Attending to Intellect.

Individuals in a doctoral program have a strong hope that they will develop intellectually, that they will leave the doctoral program with greater knowledge than they had when they began the program. The category "Attending to Intellect" involves relationships where others were viewed as responsive to the participants' need for intellectual stimulation and growth. Two subcategories, "Creativity" and "Challenge Growth" are highlighted in this category.

"Creativity"

Some participants described academia as a stale environment where "*sameness*" was fostered. In this environment, doctoral students' creativity can be suppressed in an effort to have the students complete the dissertation quickly and without complication.

This approach was disliked by some participants, and for them, creativity in their work and others' responsiveness to this need was especially important. Under these circumstances, participants' valued relationships that afforded them with an opportunity to "*think outside the box*".

According to some participants, there were several aspects to creativity. For some, creativity meant being granted permission to pursue a topic of interest that is uncommon within the department. For others, creativity involved permission to use innovative methodological or writing approaches. Finally, for some, creativity meant having the opportunity to engage in ongoing brainstorming or imaginative discussions with others involved in research. In all cases, participants reported that creativity fostered an atmosphere where they were challenged to move beyond their current comfort level. Eric stated:

> *So she likes to push the edges of ideas as well. Yeah. So that's the other piece. It's not just about allowing me to write about my own stories, but it's about pushing the intellectual edge of the university, or the academic world, like just to stick in photographs and poetry and journal entries.*

Hope was fostered in these relationships. When creativity was fostered and encouraged participants described feeling greater passion and interest for, and an increased sense of worth and meaning in, their work. Participants also described feelings of excitement, empowerment, and inspiration, as well as an increased motivation and energy and to continue to move forward in the work. Wanda described how the freedom to choose her topic also impacted who would then supervise her work. When talking about her the woman who supervised her Master's thesis, Wanda said:

> *She always encouraged my ideas... I could talk about things or different things, or do different things and she would encourage... She says, "Why not? People need to start thinking outside the box." ...I never felt limited when I was with her,*

> *I never felt like I was boxed in...she would always say, "Go out there. Do whatever" and I think that's part of why, ironically, when I did end up picking my topic for my dissertation, and going to on, she didn't quash it, even though it never, it wasn't a good fit in the department and it wasn't necessarily gonna be an easy one to make happen. She's like, "let's do it."...So then she got me set up with the other supervisor. [I felt] very empowered. Much more in control. She kind of gave me control back somehow, that sense of that this is my work still, this is mine. Own it. Be it. Do what you've got to do. And don't think you have to be what others want you to be, or fit into a mould, or whatever.*

"Challenge Growth"

Some participants reported that relationships that challenged growth served to enhance hope. In this subcategory, interactions with others involved challenging students to grow intellectually. Participants were encouraged to talk about their research, especially with others in the academic realm, including peers, professors, and members of the larger research community. It was in the context of these relationships that participants grew as academics and researchers. They were encouraged to find their voice and to develop and share their own research ideas. Others may not have always accepted participants' views, and when appropriate, their ideas were challenged or questioned. Participants, at times, were asked to defend, elaborate, and perhaps modify their views. Participants explained that this discourse could occur in person or via email. Participants welcomed these conversations when they were done in a respectful fashion because the result was increased intellectual growth and development. According to Eric, you need to:

> *Have people challenge what you're thinking. And that's what this friend, the journaling friend, you know, she would challenge me. I mean we didn't have to agree on everything. And same with [supervisor]- it's not like you agree on everything, cause at that moment you need some people to say, "this, this doesn't seem right" and "this doesn't sound like this is what you're really thinking about. This sounds to be like something else". You know, like you need people to say that.*

Attending to Pragmatic.

In response to being asked for hope influencing interactions, many participants described the importance of attending to pragmatic aspects of the dissertation process. The category "Attending to Pragmatic" includes the subcategories, "Advice" and "Facilitating". Attending to Pragmatic involves aspects of the relationships that assist students in a practical or concrete way.

"Advice"

Writing a dissertation can be a confusing and uncertain task. Some participants were faced with developing, writing, and defending their dissertation without having had experience at the Master's or undergraduate level. For others, although they have had experience with writing a Master's level thesis, the apparent increased expectations associated with the dissertation caused some confusion or apprehension. In addition to the potential uncertainty around conducting the actual research, there was, at times, some confusion or uncertainty associated with the university department's unique procedures or protocol that must be followed, as well as the requirements outlined by the graduate student association. Many participants indicated that it was under these conditions that advice from others within the academic realm (e.g., supervisors, peers, members of the supervisory committee) became especially important to influencing hope. According to Kristina:

> *[Peer] was just finishing, so she was about 6 months, 6-8 months ahead of me. So everything was fresh for her, and I was pretty close to following in her footsteps. So, so she'd be able to tell me now, "okay, here's what to expect", especially at the very end, you know, as the committees were being set up...Cause nobody else told me that. I mean, that's not something you learn at university - they don't teach you that. You just kind of find out the hard way. So I think she pulled it together for herself – talking to various people, and so I was able to get it all from [peer]...I could read it in the book, because there's that dissertation guide,*

> *um, but to have somebody speak it to say, "well, watch out here", and "here's where you go"... so I just did everything the way she did and it worked perfectly [laugh].*

Many participants highlighted the fact that timely and practical advice from trusted others enhanced hope in that it fostered an increased belief in or confidence that they would succeed. This timely and practical advice helped to generate new ideas or approaches to their work. It increased understanding of the process, and helped to clarify the appropriate course of action during times of uncertainty. Advice helped to keep the project moving forward. According to Kristina:

> *So I did try and meet about every month or two...and then she would give me some feedback... "here's some fine tuning that needs to be done", "here's some concepts", "here's some questions"... then I'd go back with um, a new motivation – a renewed motivation. And do what –it was much more clearer in my mind, a new direction that would more clearly identify the concepts that were starting to emerge, the patterns. Cause I, I just felt like I really didn't know how to write this...*

Similarly, according to Helen:

> *I remember just bringing up some kind of writing dilemma or something or other, I can't even remember, remember what it was specifically, or I was feeling bad about something, I don't know and I just mentioned it to [peers] and [they] were all over that... the two [peers] would say, "well, this is what I would do". "I don't know if it's the right answer or not, but this is what I would do". Um, and then I would think about it, and go, "yeah. Like that makes sense. And it makes sense cause then I can back it up this way."...It would just help clarify, you know, not just what to do, but where it's coming from so that you can, you can kind of back it up somehow.*

"Facilitating"

Included in this subcategory are aspects of the relationships that facilitate completion of the document. Many of the factors highlighted in this section are practical in nature, that is, something tangible or concrete was provided to the participant in the way of support. Supportive factors identified in this subcategory can be divided two

major areas, that is, support that directly (e.g., editing) and indirectly (e.g., childcare) facilitated the process of completing the dissertation. For many, hope was related to a future goal, and for the participants in this study, their goal was the completion of their dissertation. In this way, actions of others that facilitated goal achievement served to enhance hope.

When providing a direct form of support, it was important that supportive others did not take a "one size fits all" approach. Each student is unique, and therefore using the same approach with different students may not be an effective way to facilitate completion. For example, for some participants, ongoing editing of one's work was seen as valuable and helpful. According to Wanda, *"It was a wonderful support. It was very thorough and got me through. And motivated me through it. Like, physically almost by editing my manuscript...She [supervisor], like, pretty much carried me through it."* For others, this type of assistance was viewed as a potential hindrance to their process. According to Fraser:

> *I would have been horrified if she would have started to edit stuff on me... I really would have been. That would have been so destructive to me at that point because I thought I could do it and I believed that I could do it. Well, if figured I could do it, then I really didn't need somebody coming to rip it to shreds*

Or for example, some participants valued and appreciated regular meetings with their supervisors – meetings that assist with developing sub-goals or deadlines along the way to completion. As described by Eric:

> *What that did for me, was break everything up into little chunks. So that 'for next Tuesday I'd like you to think about this'...or 'you need to read this by next week and just jot down some notes". And so it broke it up into little pieces...So it was the weekly conversation.*

Others however, appreciated minimal, yet timely meetings with their supervisors and few imposed deadlines. Key here was that participants' unique needs were attended to, and supportive others were responsive to participants' needs and geared their approach to working with participants to meet this need.

When a facilitating relationship did not occur spontaneously, explicit discussions of how to best work with one another, whether initiated by the student or other (e.g., supervisor) was viewed as potentially valuable to creating a good working relationship. In this respect, the working relationship became a shared responsibility. Some participants explained that there needed to be an awareness of how they worked best and what they needed from others in the way of support. Furthermore, there had to be a willingness to share this information with supportive others. According to Helen:

> *In order to have a need met, it has to be understood, I guess. And in order for it to be understood, you have to somehow put it out there, so, it could be either um, saying directly, "hey, I've come to learn x about myself in terms of how I function, and I function better this way – so this is what I need. Is this something you can do?"*

To foster hope, others (e.g., supervisors) then had to be responsive to this expressed need.

Some participants described the indirect type of facilitating support as involving supportive others' ability to ease the potentially competing burdens that took away from their ability to work on or complete the dissertation. Participants identified family members as essential here. Examples of indirect support provided to participants included taking care of familial responsibilities (e.g., childcare) or providing financial support. According to Eric:

> *I think the support at home is really huge. I guess if you didn't have any support at home, you might, really lose hope...It's the support where, the person doesn't grumble and say, 'god, I'll sure be glad when you get back to work next year".*

Some participants have also indicated financial support offered by the university department, which allows the student to work exclusively on the dissertation, helped to facilitate the process of completion. According to Susan:

> *Financial support was important too because I was able to stick around long enough you know, I didn't have to be working a job at the same time...I was doing some teaching stuff and I was doing some research stuff for other people too, so I was doing some other things that were basically like working a job but um, it was flexible you know. So I think that was really important because if you have those financial concerns on top of everything else then I think that's a really big problem, and um, an extra stressor and that would be difficult to do.*

These indirect supportive activities helped to sustain hope, because they, in part, allowed the participant to maintain the energy required to complete the task.

Hope-Threatening Themes

This section focuses on hope; however, I now highlight hope-threatening aspects of participants' interactions with others. Feelings of hope and hopelessness, I believe, can be contagious. As a doctoral student, I found this section difficult to write. My own hope was threatened when writing this section. I experienced periods of low energy and decreased motivation for working on the remainder of this chapter. Similarly, as a reader, you may find this section of the document difficult to read, that is, you may notice yourself reacting to the hope-threatening experiences that are described by the participants in this study. Perhaps any feelings that may arise while reading this section of the document may inform the reader of the feelings that surfaced for the participants who experienced these hope-threatening situations during the dissertation process.

In this section, one main theme, "Non-Responsiveness", emerged from the interview data. This theme was derived from the two categories and the five subcategories that were identified (see Table 2). The findings in this section are presented

in a manner similar to the hope-fostering findings. That is, the theme is identified and briefly described. Second, the categories that make up the theme are discussed, including a detailed description of each of the subcategories that make up the categories. When appropriate, and when anonymity can be assured, I included excerpts from the interview transcripts.

Like the information contained in the hope-fostering section of this chapter, the theme, categories, and subcategories emerged from the interview data. The information contained in this section has an important, yet limited scope: in particular, it is meant only to reflect the participants' perceptions of their interactions with others. The information is not intended to represent or characterize, for example, supervisor perspectives of the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Table 2: Hope-Threatening Themes

SUBCATEGORIES	CATEGORIES	THEMES
Power Passive Misguiding	INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	NON-RESPONSIVENESS
Inconsistent Non-Collaboration	INEFFECTIVE APPROACH	

Non-Responsiveness

Participants described "Non-Responsiveness" as the most salient threat to hope throughout the dissertation process. This theme represents the ineffective styles or approaches that others employ when working with the participants. This theme is exclusively related to the dynamics within the supervisory relationship. This theme is called "Non-Responsiveness" to demonstrate the ways in which supervisors were seen

not to meet the needs of participants. Largely, this theme highlights the ways in which the supervisor and the student do not fit well together. Some participants expected to receive a certain level or type of support but they did not receive it and this threatened student hope during the dissertation process. Participants often saw this unmet need as a reflection of the ineffective leadership style or the ineffective approach that supervisors choose to use with the student. Accordingly, the categories that make up this theme include; "Ineffective Leadership" and "Ineffective Approach".

Ineffective Leadership.

Most participants entered supervisory relationships with certain stated or unstated expectations, namely that this relationship would somehow facilitate the completion of the dissertation. There was an assumption that the supervisor would help guide the student to completion. "Ineffective Leadership" relates specifically to leadership styles that tended to fall short of the participants' expectations. The hope-threatening subcategories that make up this theme include; "Power", "Passive", "Misguiding". Although the leadership styles vary, common among each subcategory is that the relationship is one that does not foster trust in or respect for the supervisor.

"Power"

In this subcategory some participants experienced the supervisor as someone who had power or authority over them. The participants often felt that they had little or no control of situations that arose. Participants described three types of power-based interactions, which can be viewed as existing on a continuum of power, ranging from highlighting existing power structures within the relationship to misuses or abuses of power.

The first type of power-based relationship highlights the hierarchy between student and supervisor. Some participants did not view the relationship as egalitarian; instead, they were acutely aware of the power differential between student and supervisor. Obviously, there is an inherent power differential between supervisor and student; however, key here was that the supervisor was seen by participants as behaving in a manner that maintained or fostered this differential rather than worked to minimize its existence. For example, the supervisor conveyed a message that he or she was "too busy" for the student, and that should he or she agree to meet with the student, it "better be important". This experience as described by Helen:

> *It fits for me, the word "superior", because their behaviour totally reflected that superiority – or that's how I interpreted their behaviour. It was like, "I'm busy." "You're a priority but on that list – you're not at the top. Or you're not anywhere at the top." "I have other priorities. And my time is very precious and if, if you need me then, you know, you need to come and get it kind of thing and then I'll decide if I can give it."...that was the general flavour of what I experienced.*

One prominent aspect of these hierarchical relationships was that some participants became acutely aware of the evaluative nature of the work. That is, they focused on the fact that their supervisors were continually evaluating the document and them as students. Evaluation is a real and perhaps unavoidable aspect of a doctoral dissertation; however, according to participants, when evaluation became the focus of most or all interactions it generated feelings of fear and anxiety – hope was threatened. Participants explained that as a result of this evaluation they became other-focused. They began to create and write in a manner that was aimed to secure approval of the supervisor, rather than creating a document that satisfied the self *and* other. Participants felt a need to present as competent and able largely because they did not feel safe to do otherwise. They were unable or unwilling to expose weakness or vulnerabilities –

concerned about being judged, or perhaps misjudged by the supervisor. Helen described this experience by comparing her experience with peers to her interactions with her supervisor:

> *And it's safe because you can say whatever you want, however you need to, you can struggle out loud. You can show that side, knowing that it's not going to get judged or criticized – or somehow interpreted or misinterpreted, right? Even if that means sounding silly in the process or revealing some gaps in your knowledge...which is harder to have in place – or to do even if you have, you know, regular meetings with your supervisor – depending on how they conduct things [or] what messages they send you... I mean there were certainly a couple of gaps here and there that I just like, "okay, don't go there Helen, save it for later and talk to your peers about it"... Like "Do you really want to expose that given what you know about how this person thinks, you know, and that they're evaluating you and stuff like that?"*

The second power-based type of relationship represents the ways in which participants viewed their supervisors as exerting power to influence or shape students – to mould the student to be more like the supervisor. This power, according to a few participants, was manifested when supervisors actively supported only research conducted in their particular area of interest. Therefore, a student who wished to work with, or continue to work with a particular supervisor past his or her Master's degree, had to sometimes gear their dissertation away from personally meaningful topics. Similarly, some participants felt unable to choose the method for pursuing the research topic. This difficulty, as described by Susan:

> *Part of the difficulty was that my supervisor was a hard core researcher. She was not clinically oriented. And I was almost more interested in the clinical or applied topics. And so I was trying to steer my things in that direction and it kept getting steered away from that direction for various reasons. And um, so, I think that's where a large part of the difficulty was. Because I didn't feel – she was fine with the master's, but ultimately I didn't feel I had her full support...I felt like she was almost trying to get rid of me at one point.*

Overall, in these power-based relationships, these participants did not feel totally supported in pursuing their topic of interest in the way they wanted to. Participants chose to continue to work with their supervisors, despite these differences, in part, because finding another supervisor seemed more difficult.

Finally, the supervisor was seen as exerting power by significantly influencing the content of the document by editing and re-editing the work, so much so that participants felt that their voice was entirely lost in the process - the research and the words were no longer their own. As described by some participants, this type of power based relationship served to decrease the students' sense of ownership of the document. Participants became less invested in the research. The initial hopes that the participants may have had for their dissertation became muted, and were replaced by the view that the dissertation was simply a "*means to an end*". Because of the combination of the power that supervisors had over the participants, and the decreased sense of ownership over the document, participants began to feel that attempts to change the situation were futile and they surrendered to the will of their supervisors. This surrendering was a type of survival tactic but identified by participants as reducing hope. Participants wanted to appease the supervisor and reduce conflict in an effort to maintain the supervisory relationship. Some participants were fearful of the potential consequences associated with conflict within the relationship. Participants feared retribution. For example, participants feared that conflict in the relationship could result in the supervisor imposing additional hurdles or burdens to completion. Furthermore, participants feared that conflict within the relationship could also result in a severing of the relationship, which would leave them with no supervisor

and therefore less chance of finishing their dissertation – this was seen as a serious threat to hope. As described by David:

> *It seemed like kind of a surrendering to, not to my supervisor's better judgement, but to her needs for power and her needs to feel like she was in control of something...At the time though, she would change all of my sentences and you know, re-write everything - re-write every sentence. And, it was just like this kind of weird - you know, just suppressing my own, um, agency or something. You know, like "okay, well I'll just have to put up with this... I don't want to go fight with her because she's, she's pretty imposing and um, she's pretty rigid at times." ...When it came down to the writing, I think I just kind of turned off my, my need to have control. And it was just "let's do it". Like, the, my main goal is finishing it. You know, it's not having things worded exactly the way I want.... and I think that what ended up happening was that I think what I've started to think is that having a voice in doing academic research is not really worth it.*

Finally, the third power-based relationship represents the sometimes apparently exploitative nature of the supervisory relationship. These types of misuses of power may be overt or subtle in nature. One obvious example of misuse or abuse of power as described by some participants was when supervisors claimed ownership of the student's work. Supervisors misused their position of power to take credit for work that they did not do, without properly acknowledging the participant in the process. As a result of this type of behaviour, participants reported feeling exploited, resentful, and angry at the situation. For some there was be an attempt to challenge the supervisor – but with no success. Alice reported, "*I had a, quite a heated discussion with him about that, cause I felt that the first paper I should be first author...So that was an area of conflict. I mean I let him know that I wasn't very happy with it...Anyway, he won.*" For others, there was a feeling of powerlessness or futility, a belief that even if they were to stand up for their rights nothing would change. Or perhaps more damaging to the participants, a belief that asserting self would result in increased conflict or potential backlash from the supervisor, which may have put their education in jeopardy. David talked about his experience:

> *It happened the summer of me completing my dissertation, and I thought, "if I raise a ruckus this is gonna, you know, who knows whether I graduate or not". So I just kind of thought, "Okay, let's not freak out about this." And "it's already done"....And I just thought, "Is it, is it really worth it?" and I decided it wasn't.... If I went to complain to the university or I would complain to the [name of professional organization] at [name of province] and sweet tweet would be done.*

One participant, Helen, described an experience where her attempt to talk with her supervisor about her ongoing difficulties and his apparent unwillingness to meet his supervisory responsibilities as described by department guidelines. In this situation, the supervisor appeared reluctant to accept any responsibility and instead, suggested that it was because she was a woman that she was encountering problems with his supervision. As described by Helen:

> *I was so stunned at the time that I was just like, "Did I just hear that?"...And that was the other difficulty is that he didn't take any ownership or any responsibility in any of our interactions.... So I mean it was very insulting and I did think for a while that there was something wrong with me... Then the icing at the very end was, "well, should you not choose to continue on with me, I would suggest that you wouldn't tell too many people because, you know, that might look – reflect badly on you if you do – if other people become aware of this".*

Subtle ways of misusing power were described as the way in which supervisors used the relationship to meet their own emotional needs, rather than working to meet the needs of the student. In some respects the supervisory relationship appears similar to that of a therapist-client or doctor-patient relationship. Specifically, these professional relationships exist to meet the particular need of the client or patient and professional boundaries should be maintained. It appears that participants wanted the supervisory relationship to be a place where their emotional experiences were not discounted, but rather were acknowledged by the supervisor as real and as potentially impacting the dissertation process. When participants believed that supervisors were using the

relationship to meet their emotional needs, they felt exploited and used. This was especially salient for one participant, David, who described this experience:

> *A crystallizing experience for me was being in the hospital, being in intensive care, and phoning her and saying, "I'm really sick. I'm really messed up. I think I'm going to have to take time off school, time away from school". And like she gave me like a minute or two of support and then she went into this long monolog about health problems that she had during grad school. And so it was like this kind of weird, I don't know, I felt like...I had to turn into the one who was supporting her, and listening to her problem. You know what I mean? It's like that kind of weird role reversal....And so I just really had this feeling "okay, this is another exploitive person, and I really have to get away from her"*

Common among all three types of power-based relationships was that the participants felt somewhat insecure within the relationships and cautious about asserting themselves for fear of negative consequences to their academic career. Further complicating this issue of power was that the supervisor sometimes had multiple roles while interacting with the participant, and that asserting oneself within the context of the supervisory relationship meant that the participant may face difficulties in other areas. For example, the supervisor may hold a position of power in the regulatory body for which the student will eventually belong. To assert oneself with the supervisor may result in potential backlash that would extend beyond the educational experience. It was the belief that this may occur that created an increase sense of vulnerability for the student.

Furthermore, a supervisor may have multiple roles within the department and therefore be in a position of authority over the student in several ways. These multiple roles allow for greater opportunity to misuse power. Interactions that occurred outside of the supervisory relationship may therefore have a negative impact on the supervisory relationship, and perhaps, as was the case for one participant, ultimately resulting in a severing of the supervisory relationship.

"Passive"

Supervisory relationships that were characterized as "Passive" were seen as hope-threatening. This subcategory was endorsed by some participants and is highlighted by the apparent passive approach that supervisors take with students is highlighted. Participants described this passive leadership style as an unwillingness or inability to get involved with the student and his/her work. According to participants, this lack of involvement can be demonstrated in several ways. For example, the supervisor may take a passive approach when *helping* the student conduct and write up the research. In these circumstances, the supervisor was seen as not providing meaningful or useful feedback regarding the participant's work. There were few, if any, meaningful discussions around ideas and participants believed that they were alone – they must develop, conduct, and write the research with little or no guidance from the supervisor. Once the document was written, or while in the process of writing the document, the supervisor was seen as providing nothing more than superficial feedback about the document in progress, commenting only, for example, on grammatical or structural issues rather than on content or ideas. Because there was little or no feedback participants began to wonder whether they were producing quality work or whether the supervisor was just too indifferent or uninterested to read or comment on the work. This experience described by Helen:

> *I don't recall any input from [supervisor] whatsoever....I don't recall anything too thought provoking where I would go, "Whoa". I constantly felt like, "Wow, I'm either doing a really good job here that I don't need any feedback" or "He's just kind of, I don't know, taking short cuts and doesn't really [care].*

The passive leadership style can also be demonstrated when, in addition to not taking an active role in the research, supervisors were seen as not fulfilling their responsibilities as outlined by the university department's procedures. Supervisors, rather

than fulfilling their role, were viewed as passively rejecting it and suggesting that participants must take care of these tasks for themselves. For example, as was evident for one participant, the student may be asked to establish committees, which is clearly the responsibility of the supervisor.

Participants indicated that this passivity, or lack of involvement, resulted in a belief that they were not a priority. Participants were left feeling that their supervisors were not invested in their success – that they were alone. Participants felt like they were being treated as a number, a statistic – just one of many. They felt unsupported by and unimportant to the supervisor. In this atmosphere – hope was threatened. According to Helen:

> *It was very disappointing like for me. I think it was demoralizing.... A lack of involvement - I don't live in a vacuum right? It's like, I rely on feedback, I rely on context...You're looking for something to inspire you or guide you - It's disappointing. It's angering. I was pretty angry the further things went on, and it was just more of the same. It's like I just couldn't understand. Like, why is this? Like what is his role then? Like why is he here?*

Students were also left feeling confused and uncertain as to how to proceed, and were often required to find support in other places, including support from peers.

"Misguiding"

Students often look for guidance from their supervisors. As highlighted in the "Partnership" category of the hopeful theme, many participants expected that their supervisor would guide them in the right direction; that they should follow the advice because it was reliable. Conversely, in this subcategory, highlighting threats to hope, some participants illustrate the ways in which they believed they were misguided or misdirected by their supervisors: This misdirection threatened hope. Misguiding the student can result in a disturbance in the supervisory relationship. When participants

believed that they were not guided appropriately they began to question whether the supervisor's advice was trustworthy. Participants were uncertain as to whether they should trust any future feedback or guidance that they had been given by their supervisor. This lack of trust jeopardized the supervisory relationship as participants began to wonder whether the supervisor truly had their best interest in mind. Helen described this experience when a paper she submitted on the advice of her supervisor was rejected for publication:

> *And **they** read it. I know they read it. Which again leads to a bit of disappointment because then you go, "How did my supervisor miss that?" and "Why did she let me send it out?" You know. And at one point it felt like I was being thrown to the wolves...I guess I started being critical of my supervisor in that regard because like again, questioning you know, "did you even read the – like you're a professor, you're in academia, you're you know, accustom to this – ...but it's like, "how is it that you could have missed that stuff?"*

These participants understood that being misguided by one's supervisor was perhaps unintentional - an oversight on the part of the supervisor. More extreme, and perhaps more damaging for the student as well as the supervisory relationship, was when the supervisor intentionally and deliberately provided inappropriate direction to the participant. Prominent here was when the student was directed to behave in a manner that participants perceived as unethical. When this occurred, participants were placed in an awkward position with limited options available to them. They could accept the direction and behave unethically. Or, they could resist the advice, which had the potential to sever the relationship with the supervisor and/or bring with it other forms of repercussions. In an effort to protect anonymity, I have purposely not included excerpts of the transcripts that support this statement.

It is important to note that participants stated that they do not expect their supervisors to be perfect. There was an understanding that supervisors may make mistakes in supervision, or perhaps may lack the knowledge or information to appropriately direct the student. Key here, as a threat to participants' hope, was the apparent inability or unwillingness of the supervisors to take ownership of their mistakes or openly discuss them. Participants wanted to make meaning from their experience. Participants wanted to discuss what happened so that both the supervisor and the student could learn from the experience. There was a hope that if one learns from the experience it would not be repeated in the future. When supervisors were unwilling to acknowledge that a mistake was made, then they were also unlikely to engage in a conversation that could encourage growth and understanding. Participants' hope appeared threatened because their negative experiences appeared meaningless.

Ineffective Approach.

For most, writing a dissertation is a new academic experience and thus, most students require some guidance and support from individuals who have themselves completed a dissertation. More often than not, the dissertation supervisor offers this support. There are several approaches, some effective, some ineffective, that a supervisor can employ when working to help the student. The category, "Ineffective Approach" represents the ways in which some participants explained that supervisors used ineffective approaches to help or motivate them. The hope threatening subcategories that make up this theme include; "Inconsistency" and "Non-Collaboration".

"Inconsistency"

This subcategory reflects the inconsistent nature of the interactions between the supervisor and the student. According to some participants, inconsistency can be manifested in several ways; but similar among these inconsistencies was that they generated feelings of mistrust and created perhaps avoidable complications regarding the completion of the dissertation. Lack of trust in the relationship, as well as increased complications were seen as a threat to hope.

First, supervisors were viewed as inconsistent when they reviewed students' work and provided feedback or suggestions that differed from one time to another, or that were contradictory. It appeared that participants were initially willing to accept the feedback and incorporate it in the document; however, when the feedback seemed to continuously change for no apparent reason, participants began to feel frustrated and angry. Participants became discouraged by the need to continually make changes to the document, when they did not trust that the changes they made would be the last. Participants became confused or uncertain about how to proceed. According to Helen:

> *I think the faith was a little bit diminished too.... I'd go in one time with edits or something and it would be like – she'd say one thing, and then I'd go back, and it would be something completely different... And it's like, "How am I supposed to know what it is you do want if you keep changing it?" [laugh] Right?... "You've taught me that I just need to do it the way you want me to but, if you're not clear then I can't be clear."*

According to David:

> *She'd read something and say "Oh take this and this and this and this out" and then next time she reads it say, "Oh, where is such and such and such. Why isn't that in there?" So, contradictory messages...just kind of lack of continuity...That was frustrating and I was angry a lot.*

The second possible form of inconsistency occurred when the supervisor was seen as acting inconsistent with the expressed wish of the supervisory committee. Some participants explained that when this occurred, they became more suspicious of their supervisor, and therefore were more hesitant to accept their supervisors' advice or guidance. Participants felt an increased feeling of anxiety and fear. On some level, because of this lack of trust or confidence in their supervisors, participants also wondered about the potential consequences of relying exclusively on the advice of their supervisor. In particular, participants were concerned that, because the committee did not have access to the developing dissertation, their document may not be acceptable to the committee. Participants worried that they would ultimately be required to make substantial changes once the committee had read the final document, thus creating additional, and perhaps avoidable work.

For some participants when the requests of the committee and the supervisor were different, they indicated that that began to feel like a "*pawn in a game of chess*", being asked to fulfil multiple and perhaps contradictory requirements. In this case, they felt uncertain as to how to proceed. They also described feeling a lack of control and vulnerability that threaten their hope. According to Susan:

> *So I had to do all this stuff to appease everybody... "What if I take it to this person and they don't like what I've done?"...It was that fear, that "what if", more than anything...."Were they going to be happy with what I had done? Or were they going to turn around in that meeting and say, 'Well I think you need to do this.'"...So it was a real, almost a learned helplessness kind of thing. Cause I had no control over that, at all. You know, I do my thing and I'm at the complete mercy of a number of people, not just one person, but a whole bunch of people in terms of what they think. And I think that was real tough... The other thing is that my thesis supervisor didn't agree with them all the time either. So they were sort of battling it out in terms of what I should be doing... I'm kind of the pawn sort of being moved to an extent....And I was just trying to get out of there, you know. I*

didn't really feel like I could take a stand on it. I was just trying to make everybody happy, you know, and get done.

The third form of "Inconsistency" occurred when the supervisor's words and actions did not appear to match. For example, participants expected that their supervisor would follow through with their verbal promise – if the supervisor said he or she would do something, the participants expected that it would occur. If their supervisor expressed verbally a willingness to support them, then participants expected that the supervisor would follow through with action (e.g., a willingness to work on behalf of the student). If the supervisor indicated that the document was sufficient, participants expected that the supervisor would at least attempt to advocate on their behalf with the committee and/or the department. When faced with these inconsistencies, the resulting experiences ranged from anger, as with David "*And I just wanted to strangle my supervisor, I was so frustrated.*", to mistrust and confusion, as with Helen *"I couldn't trust his word anymore... He was agreeing to stuff and then changing it shortly thereafter. And it's like, I didn't know which end was up anymore."*

Overall, an atmosphere of inconsistency created instability within the supervisory relationship and this was viewed as a threat to hope. Consistency in the relationship, as described earlier in the hope-fostering section, helped to engender feelings of safety, trust, and comfort within the supervisory relationship. Conversely, this inconsistent approach decreased participants' trust in their supervisors and comfort within the relationship. Feelings of hope are not fostered in this negative environment. Hope was threatened during these times in a practical way as well. Participants explained that their goal, their hope, was to complete the dissertation in a timely fashion and with the greatest amount of ease. Hope was threatened because when their supervisor was seen as

behaving in an inconsistent fashion, reaching their goal, that is, completing the dissertation seemed unnecessarily complicated.

"Non-Collaboration"

This subcategory may appear to overlap with the "Power" based relationship described earlier. Despite this overlap, I have chosen to include this subcategory in the "Ineffective Approach" category, as I believe it can serve to highlight the ineffective methods that supervisors may use in working with or motivating students.

Some participants explained that supervisors who took a "Non-collaborative" approach to working with students did not involve them in decisions that impacted them. Rather, supervisors were seen as assuming to know what was best for them and imposing this onto them. What was missing, according to participants, was the invitation for dialogue about their needs, or an attempt to problem solve in a way that allowed for their input. As described by David, participants wished for *"a more kind of egalitarian, collaborative, respectful approach"*.

Some could argue that it is the students' responsibility to share their concerns with their supervisors; however, key here was that supervisors were not seen as responsive to this feedback. Supervisors conveyed a message that did not invite this type of dialogue. The perceived power differential described earlier in this section also hindered free and open communication between student and supervisor, where participants did not feel comfortable talking about these issues with their supervisor.

Some participants explained that one example of this non-collaborative approach was for the supervisor to impose expectations or deadlines that were artificially created and that did not fit with the time line that they had outlined for themselves. Participants

were not consulted or included in the discussion and thus appeared less invested in keeping to the schedule that was proposed. At times, some participants believed that the time lines or deadlines that had been established were unrealistic, and thus unattainable. Participants began to lose hope. Their attempts to keep up to the time line established by their supervisors were met with continuous failures. Eventually, participants began to become self-critical and question their abilities as academics or writers, this was especially evident for one participant. Eventually, in part due to a survival strategy, participants learned to ignore this type of "guidance". They believed that by ignoring the timelines that were established *for* them, they were then able to set time lines that were more realistic – more attainable. These participants established their own time lines or sub-goals thus allowing them to achieve their own measure of success along the way. Achieving success, rather than continually falling short according to expectations of their supervisors, fostered hope rather than diminished it. As described by Helen:

> *And another thing that wasn't helpful or hopeful in the writing process...I found my supervisor would have unrealistic expectations... And so there was this weird, distorted expectation that I could get certain things done in a short amount of time. And I don't know if that was her way of trying to motivate me, or get me to see the light at the end of the tunnel – I don't know ...I thought her estimates – they were always off, they were consistently off. And so there was consistently an ingredient in there that wasn't getting acknowledged. Initially it created a lot of anxiety for me because it's like, "Why am I not getting this done?" "What's wrong with me?"... But I slowly started to recognize that she was unrealistic in her time estimate... So luckily with a little bit of work, I managed to be okay with missing the deadlines. And in the end, it was a bit of a joke for me, like I would just go, "okay I'll do my best".*

A more extreme form of non-collaboration beyond *imposing* deadlines on the student was to use fear tactics to enforce the deadlines. Some participants explained that fear tactics were used under different circumstances. For example, when participants were approaching the end of their time allotted to complete the degree, (i.e., six years) or

when participants were not seen as progressing on the time line that their supervisor had set out for them – thus seemingly being behind schedule. Participants explained that rather than engaging in a dialogue about how best to complete their dissertation, some supervisors threatened them with expulsion from the program or alternately, reminded them that if they did not hurry they would not earn their doctoral degree. Under these circumstances, the message conveyed to the participants was one of uncertainty – a lack of confidence in their ability to be successful.

The reality within academe is that deadlines do exist. The issue was not that deadlines needed to be addressed within the context of the supervisory relationship. Participants acknowledged that they might have been behind schedule. They also acknowledged that their supervisors might have been under pressure from the department or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research to have their students complete in a timely fashion. Participants also appreciated that their supervisors were likely attempting to motivate them to complete the dissertation. However, participants who spoke of this issue said that they resented the threatening approach that their supervisor employed to meet this objective. As some participants noted, they had been accepted into doctoral programs because they were competent academics, and therefore it seemed unnecessary to *"lecture"* to them as if they were children. Participants felt disrespected by supervisors who engaged in these behaviours, and thus respected their supervisors less for using this approach. Participants felt "*frustrated*" and "*angry*", "*insulted*" and "*demeaned*". According to Helen:

> *Being lectured at – I mean that's what you do to your kid who doesn't quite get it yet, right?...whenever she cracked down on me and did the fear mongering thing and talking* ***at*** *me and waving a finger...not physically, but the tone, the tone was*

> *a finger wagging tone – "you need to finish cause if you don't finish – da da da da da*

Participants also felt dismissed because they believed that their supervisor did not take into consideration legitimate reasons as to why the research was delayed or behind schedule. A lack of recognition of these issues was seen as a threat to hope.

This apparently heavy-handed approach had a paradoxical effect. Rather than fostering feelings of hope (e.g., belief in ability to succeed, sustaining motivation and energy) participants described an experience where hope was threatened. Participants stated that rather than motivating them to continue, they became increasingly more anxious, more pressured, more stressed, and more fearful. These feelings actually hinder the process of completing. They felt less motivated to work on the dissertation. At times, they questioned whether they should even continue or whether they would ultimately be successful even if they did try.

According to Helen:

> *All this fear mongering, and I was like, "holy crap"...I mean for a little while, initially, when that stuff was coming out, I was like "holy crap I better get in gear here" but fear is not a good motivator for me – it's just not a good place to work from. If anything, I think it can slow you down...you know, you come across a paragraph that you're like struggling with, and you're like, "oh" and now you have an extra layer of fear to deal with. So now you're not just stuck, you're stuck and you're not going to finish on time [laugh]. So, I mean, and that adds a whole new dimension. And it's like, "Why would you want to do that?". Like, it just doesn't – "okay, yeah we had that deadline, but, what can you say to me or talk to me about that's going to facilitate me getting there quick, more quickly?"*

One participant in this study, Susan, experienced a more extreme form of non-collaboration or fear-based motivation. She was placed on academic probation. Susan indicated that she believed that her supervisor's decision to advocate for academic probation was her attempt to motivate Susan. Susan was placed on academic probation,

not because her grades were poor – they were not. She indicated that she was placed on academic probation because her supervisor believed that she should have been further along in her dissertation. To put this experience in context, Susan had dedicated two full years working on the project, however, unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances she was required to start anew on a different dissertation topic. In her case, it appeared that her supervisor discounted Susan's previous efforts and focused exclusively on the fact that she was not further along on her dissertation. As a result of this experience, Susan's hope was threatened. Her confidence or belief in herself was shaken. She experienced a decreased motivation to work on her dissertation and began to question whether she should continue. This experience was difficult for Susan, and it was clear during the course of her interview, that it continued to be an emotionally laden topic for her.

> *There was actually another incident as well, which I don't talk about very much because it was very upsetting... I was actually put on academic probation. [Susan began to cry and continued to cry as we continued to talk about this topic]...It was really embarrassing. That's part of what it was....and the confidence issue, partly. I don't think it was totally shattered. I think I have a good reserve of confidence... It's hard to totally break me that way. Um, but, I tend to get more in the fighting mode. You know. "I'm going to show them". But I did have those moments where I was wondering "Can I do this?", "Am I going to be able finish", and "Do I need this degree or should I just stop at the master's?"...That was probably, that was the lowest point. Cause I had never experienced anything like that.*

Summary

This section highlighted those aspects of relationships or interactions that were hope-threatening for participants. How these interactions threaten hope is perhaps more obvious when compared to the hope fostering themes of "Alliance" and "Responsiveness to Students' Needs" which were described earlier. Participants, when describing hope-fostering interactions, described moments of increased or renewed energy, motivation

and passion for their dissertation. Participants described feelings of increased interest in and enjoyment of the research process. Participants spoke of increased feelings of empowerment, ownership, and confidence or belief in themselves and their ability to succeed. Participants spoke of common or shared goals, practical advice and support, and facilitating the dissertation process. Conversely, the overall information presented in the "Non-responsiveness" theme suggests that hope-threatening moments are associated with negative feelings, for example, feelings of fear and anxiety, anger and frustration, uncertainty and lack of control, insecurities and enhanced vulnerability. Additionally, participants described moments of decreased energy and motivation and increased avoidance of the dissertation. As such, rather than actively working to achieve their goal, participants' progress was instead stunted or hindered by these feelings, ultimately rendering achievement of their goal (i.e., completion of the dissertation) more difficult. Rather than fostering confidence, hope-threatening interactions promoted thoughts of self-doubt. Participants described moments, as a result of hope-threatening experiences, in which they began to question their abilities or where their confidence in themselves waned. Participants began to question their ultimate goal and wonder whether they should continue to pursue their doctoral degree. Lack of confidence and questioning their goal, individually and collectively, served to negatively impact goal directed behaviour. These elements, energy, confidence, goals, and goal directed behaviour, have been described in the literature review section of this document as components of hope and hopelessness. The next chapter explores these issues further.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the dynamics of hope-fostering and hope-threatening interactions experienced by doctoral student who were working on their dissertation. The study was based on the premise that hope plays an important role in academic success, an argument proposed by Snyder and colleagues (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002). The findings of the study are consistent with assertions made by Snyder and colleagues, that is, participants acknowledge the role of hope in their doctoral school and dissertation experiences. The second premise that served as the foundation for this study was the belief that relationships can serve to enhance or threaten hope - an assertion that has been repeatedly supported by previous researchers (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Benzein et al., 2000; Bernard, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Eliott & Olver, 2002; Farran et al., 1995; Haase et al., 1992; Jevne et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin et al., 1990; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). Again, the findings of this study support this assertion. Participants in this study were easily able to identify interactions or relationships that served to nurture or threaten hope. Together, the findings of this study suggest that (1) hope appears to be an important element in the dissertation process and (2) doctoral students' relationships with others can enhance or threaten hope, and therefore impact the dissertation process.

I begin this chapter with an addition to "my hope story" which was presented at the beginning of this document. I also briefly explore the various conceptualizations of hope provided by participants of this study and highlight how their conceptualizations compare to those provided in the research literature. I examine issues related to nurturing

hope within the context of the dissertation process. I also discuss the recommendations that have arisen from the findings of the study, as well as outline the limitations of the current study. Finally, I provide suggestions for future research.

My hope story... continued

I started this document by telling my hope story. That story is an account of the relationships and interactions that impacted my hope throughout the dissertation process; however, because of the focus of this study, it did not take into consideration all of the hope-impacting experiences that I encountered in my years as a doctoral student, especially while working on my dissertation. My hope throughout this process has been impacted by several other experiences that occurred during this time. I will describe these experiences now. I chose to begin by writing about some of my personal reflections on hope in an effort to help the reader better understand the experiences that influenced my hope.

To me hope is like a fire that burns inside of me. My hope is intimately connected to my sense of purpose and meaning in life. Hope serves as the fuel for my drive to live my life to the fullest – of which one aspect is to reach the goals that I have set for myself. This goal setting aspect of hope permeates all aspects of my life, including my academic life. As suggested in my original hope story, once I have set a goal for myself, I am driven to reach this goal despite any adversities that I may encounter along the way – I *know* I will reach my goal - this is one way that my hope is manifested.

The question is NOT whether hope is present or absent in my life – hope is a constant in my life because I believe that it lives inside of me. It is more a question of degree – how much hope is present in my life at any given time? My hope is fostered or

threatened in several ways, including, as I mentioned in my original hope story, through my relationships or connectedness with others.

I also believe that I can *choose* hope. I believe that I can choose to nurture or threaten my hope though my relationships with myself. As it relates to my doctoral program and my dissertation, I was able to nurture my hope in simple yet effective ways. For example, when I purposely recalled my past successes or I consciously imagined my future successes, I generated feelings of hope. Similarly, my hope was threatened when I chose to remain "stuck" in a rut – when I focused my thoughts on "how difficult the dissertation process was" rather than on "how privileged I was to be given the opportunity to pursue this degree". Throughout this process, perhaps not surprisingly, I moved through periods of high and low hope – times that were often created by me and my thought process at any given time.

Although I never lost sight of my ultimate academic goal, my hope was also tempered by external factors that occurred during my years of study. Like many other doctoral students, my daily life was often bombarded with normal demands on my time – work, family, friends, and fun. The years that I spent working to get this degree, and the months it took to finish this document, also chipped away at my hope. Additionally, as I describe in greater detail later in this chapter, the unique experience of writing about the hope-threatening experiences of others also threatened my hope.

Unfortunately, big hope-threatening moments also occurred – in particular, the death of people close to me. As a result of one death in particular, I began to examine my fundamental belief system – which of course also challenged my ideas of hope. As a result of these external factors, there were many moments where I became distracted,

discouraged, disengaged, and disinterested in the dissertation process. There were moments where the thought of quitting school and "getting on with my life" entered my mind but thankfully I didn't act on it – my hope was tempered but it remained.

As I write this section, I am acutely aware that I am not alone. I am not the only doctoral student who has faced difficulty in my personal, professional, and/or academic life while enrolled in a doctoral program. Although this experience is uniquely mine – it is similar to the one shared by many, including my participants, and somehow, knowing this gives me hope!

Construct of hope

The hope literature provides multiple definitions or conceptualizations of hope, suggesting that hope is a difficult concept to define. There is no scholarly consensus regarding the definition of hope. The findings of my study suggest that it is easier to *experience* hope than it is to define it. Although some participants easily provided clear and concise personal definitions of hope, others struggled with articulating their definition – despite the fact that these same individuals were easily able to talk about interactions that impacted their hope. Although not the focus of the research study, I have briefly summarized the various ways in which the participants have described hope.

Participants largely describe hope as future oriented – a "*striving towards*", a "*wish*", "*forward movement*", and a working towards "*reaching one's potential*". For some, hope is associated with the expectation of a positive future. Other participants indicate that the future is somewhat uncertain, and that hope is about readiness to accept opportunities that arise or about the belief in "*possibilities*" rather than certainties. Both of these conceptualizations of hope are consistent with that described in the literature. For

example, Benzein et al. (2000) indicates that hope is associated with "positive outcome and consequences" (p. 308) or a belief in a better future. Similarly, Nowotny (1989) indicates that hope is associated with "possibility of a future"– that there is light at the end of the tunnel (p. 60).

Related to the future orientation of hope is the issue of goal setting. Participants describe hope as setting a goal and working towards achieving this goal. This goal directed aspect of hope is consistent with the definition of hope provided by Snyder (1995) who notes that "we are intrinsically goal oriented when we think about our future" (p. 355). Furthermore, participants note that goals can be specific (i.e., completing dissertation) or more vague (i.e., working to reach your potential). This conceptualization is consistent with Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) two "spheres of hope", specifically "particularized" and "generalized" hope. According to Dufault and Martocchio, particularized hope is connected to a hoping object (i.e., dissertation), whereas generalized hope is "a sense of some future beneficial but indeterminate development" (p. 380) (i.e., reaching your potential).

As it relates to goal attainment, participants describe a behavioural component to hope. There is an appreciation that reaching goals requires work – that to achieve your goal you must, as David states, "*engage in goal directed behaviour*". This behavioural component to hoping has been highlighted by previous researchers. For example, Nowotny (1989) indicates that one must be actively, rather than passively, involved in goal setting, whereas Farran and colleagues (1995) suggest that hope is an active process, such as, taking steps to reach one's goals. Furthermore, Dufault & Martocchio (1985)

suggest that there is a "behavioural dimension" to hope, which involves acting in a manner that is consistent with achieving one's goals.

In addition to this behavioural component of hope, participants also describe a cognitive aspect to hope and goal attainment. Specifically, that the hoping person holds the belief and/or confidence that he or she will reach the goal – an *"I can"* perspective. Furthermore, participants note that they held confidence in the notion that if they worked hard, they would succeed – they would successfully complete their PhD. As reflected in previous hope literature, hope and confidence are intimately connected, and when defining hope, many researchers refer to confidence (Benzein et al., 2000; Nowotny, 1989). This cognitive component of hope, as described by participants, is also consistent with what Snyder and colleagues define as "agency" thinking – the belief that "I will succeed" (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991).

Participants in this study indicate that this cognitive component of hope is also associated with a sense of personal empowerment. For participants, hope is connected to the belief that they are in control of their lives – in control of their academic successes and failures. Farran and colleagues (1995) also highlight this aspect of hope. According to these researchers, hoping also involves control or a sense that one has control over one's life.

Finally, although not always articulated clearly in their definition of hope, participants describe a feeling component to hope and reaching one's goal. This feeling component to hope is clearly evident when participants relay their hope-impacting interactions, that is, participants talk about "*meaning*", "*passion*", "*motivation*" and "*energy*". According to Snyder and colleagues, these feelings are a by-product of agency

thinking. Believing "I can" provides us with the energy that sustains us as we work towards achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991).

As in all research, how we frame our questions influences the nature of the accounts shared. The nature of my overall research focus may have influenced how participants expressed their conceptualization of hope. First, the topic under discussion was *the process of completing a dissertation* – a goal oriented topic. Second participants were asked to describe their conceptualization or definition of hope at the end of our interviews, after having spent a considerable amount of time talking about their experience of achieving their academic goal. Under different circumstances, participants may have described or defined hope differently, a notion supported by the research of Duggleby (2001). Specifically, Duggleby found that the accounts and descriptions of hope provided by terminally ill versus non-terminally ill patients differed. Overall, participants in this study conceptualize hope in a manner that appears most consistent with that proposed by Snyder and colleagues. Hope is largely linked to a particular goal or outcome. Goal directed thoughts, feelings and behaviours are also highlighted in their conceptualization of hope.

Hope and the Doctoral School Experience

Most participants commented on the overall largely negative or unsupportive climate within their various departments. Overall, participants described an environment where hope is not readily fostered. Participants had developed their opinion about university departments either through direct contact (e.g., personal experiences), indirect contact (e.g., through witnessing their peers' experiences) or through a combination of

both direct and indirect experiences. Participants varied with respect to the level of direct impact that the department climate had on them. Overall, and perhaps not surprisingly, it appears that the student's relationship with the supervisor plays an important role with respect to moderating this impact. Participants who describe a hope-fostering and supportive relationship with their supervisor indicate that they felt protected or sheltered from the politics associated with the graduate school environment.

Participants in this study had wide ranging experiences while in graduate school and while writing their doctoral dissertation. Only two participants indicated that overall, their program and their dissertation was largely straightforward and trouble free. Six participants indicated that doctoral school was at least somewhat difficult and that their experience was coloured by hope-threatening moments, some large, some small. One participant indicated that, in retrospect, she is happy to have a PhD, but given her experience she is uncertain about whether she would make the decision to pursue a PhD if she had to it to do again. Another participant indicated that due to his experiences in graduate school, had he to do it all again, he would choose a different career path, one that did not include graduate school. Finally, one participant, only somewhat jokingly, reported that her children would not be permitted to pursue a PhD given the struggles that she endured during the program. I provide this information to highlight that the doctoral school experience can be a difficult one. Not surprisingly, despite several years in school many doctoral students do not finish their program (Elgar, 2003).

Participants in this study report moments of isolation and self-doubt, and moments where perceived adversities (e.g., additional and perhaps unnecessary burdens and/or hurdles) threatened hope and made the dissertation process more difficult. My

experience as a doctoral student, which was described at the beginning of this document, is similar to that described by some of the participants in this study. In particular, my hope was threatened during times when I was faced with what I believed to be unnecessary hurdles. The findings of this study and my personal experience are consistent with previous research that indicated that the graduate school experience can be associated with feelings of isolation (Inman & Silverstein, 2003; Johnson & Conyers, 2001), burnout and stress (Inman & Silverstein, 2003), and difficulties or differences with the advisor or supervisory committee (Faghihi, 1998; Inman & Silverstein, 2003; Lenz, 1995).

The findings of this study suggest that for those who encountered difficulties, hope, including future orientation and goal focused determination, was an important factor that allowed students to overcome or cope with the stress and persevere despite these difficulties. All participants in this study describe a strong hope for success. In addition to having this common goal, all participants worked hard to achieve their goal, despite any setbacks that they may have encountered along the way. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, suggesting that hope was an important factor for program completion (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002), academic success (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002), and goal attainment (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991).

Although all participants in this study had a common hope, to finish their dissertation, they varied with respect to their *awareness* of hope during their time as students. Some participants were consciously aware of hope, that is, named their experiences using the language of hope to describe it. Others became aware of

experiences of hope upon reflecting back on their doctoral school experiences. As participants suggested, for them it was not that hope was absent during their doctoral school experiences, but rather, at the time, they did not reflect intentionally on hope. Interviews asked former students to examine their experience through the lens of hope, and thus, served to raise awareness of the role that hope played in their process. Despite the various levels of awareness, in retrospect participants in this study acknowledged that hope was a real and important part of their doctoral school experience. As described by Helen:

> *I am a lot more mindful of hope now...I'm just really amazed at what I've learned about hope and the role of hope in my process. And how much I've learned about the pockets of hope. And it can help guide you if you take the time to reflect on that – it can really help guide you and in some ways, I wish I had done that throughout.*

Nurturing hope in the context of the dissertation

Hope-Impacting Relationships

The structure of academic departments is formally set by rules and guidelines that have the power to influence decisions and colour interactions. Within academia there are deadlines that need to be enforced. When conducting research and writing a dissertation, there is a certain protocol that must be followed. The practicality of academia is that people must examine academic work critically – a doctoral student's work must be evaluated and measured against some academic standard. A student must create and defend a document in a way that garners approval from the examining committee. Unfortunately, however, many participants in this study advise that these environmental factors are a real threat to hope. The participants in this study talk about how the evaluative component of their interactions with others negatively impacted hope. They

talk of the anxiety and potentially paralysing impact associated with upcoming deadlines. They speak of the fear associated with the uncertainty about how supervisory and examining committees would evaluate and judge their work. In some respects, participants felt as though the situation was beyond their immediate control – some participants could not predict or influence how their supervisors would react to the document, nor could they influence the thoughts or opinions of their supervisory or examination committees.

Both the student and the supervisor must work within the boundaries of the departmental environment, boundaries such as deadlines, committee adjudication, etc. These realities cannot be ignored. Furthermore, participants are clear with respect to their views on the overall climate within an academic environment. Given these factors, the question, I believe, then becomes how can one foster hope while completing a dissertation within the current structure of the university environment? I believe that the answer may be found in the quality of the relationship that the student has with his or her supervisor. Interestingly, the findings of this study suggest that the type or quality of working relationship that a student has with his or her supervisor can often mitigate the hope-threatening aspect of academic realities. For example, it was those participants who reported negative or tenuous relationships with their supervisors who were more likely to indicate that this departmental reality or environment threatened their hope. Whereas, those participants who described a supportive, empowering, and partnership type relationship with their supervisors appeared less directly impacted by these apparent academic realities – a reality for most students.

If one accepts as true the assertion that the supervisory relationship is key to mitigating the negative impact of departmental realities, than an examination of the hope-fostering and hope-threatening qualities of the supervisory relationship, as described by participants, is a key to understanding how to foster hope in an environment that, according to most participants, often does not appear conducive to hope. According to participants, alliance with one's supervisor is key to fostering hope. In these relationships, the supervisor and the student work as a team, with both members striving to reach the common goal of dissertation completion. Within these relationships, the student feels valued and important. Unlike those qualities found in hope-threatening relationships, in hope-fostering relationships students are encouraged to pursue their areas of interest and to have ownership over the document that they are producing. Collaborative discussions are key to hope-fostering relationships. This dialogue is viewed as essential as it provides students with the opportunity to voice concerns and generate solutions to issues, including potential issues related to deadlines and departmental procedures. On the other hand, collaborative discussions were clearly lacking in the hope-threatening supervisory relationships. In these hope-threatening relationships, students were not given an opportunity to problem-solve or voice their concerns or struggles in a meaningful way. For example, they were not afforded an opportunity to generate solutions as it related to impending deadlines.

There is safety and comfort within hope-fostering relationships. Trust is essential and is nurtured within the relationship. Trust and hope are both enhanced when the supervisory relationship is one in which two people come together in a *real* or genuine fashion. Unlike hope-threatening relationships, in hope-fostering relationships the power

differential between supervisor and student is minimized. Hope is fostered when the supervisor is viewed as consistent and dependable. Within this atmosphere of trust and acceptance, students are free to be themselves – to display vulnerabilities and concerns without fear of rejection or judgment.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that hope-fostering relationships are characterized by such factors as trust, equality and dialogue. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous researchers who explored hope-fostering and hope-threatening interactions or relationships with others. For example, in their study that explored hope-impacting doctor-patient interactions, Wong-Wylie and Jevne (1997) demonstrate that hope is enhanced in relationships where the relationship is one in which there is an equal partnership, a relationship where doctors allow patients to be active in decisions that have impact on them, a relationship in which patients feel important or special. Conversely, doctor-patient relationships that are characterized by "hope-less interactions," are those in which the doctor is viewed as "authoritative," where patients feel judged and unable to participate actively in their medical treatment. The patients are left with a sense that "they are wasting the doctor's time." There are obvious parallels between hope-impacting interactions between the doctor-patient and supervisor-student relationships, including the power differential that exists in the relationship.

Similarly, Cutcliff and Barker (2002), who examined and advocated for a hope inspiring approach to working with suicidal patients, indicate that to engender hope one must convey a message of acceptance and tolerance. One must create an atmosphere in which patients are able to talk openly with care providers. Again, consistent with the

findings of this study, these researchers suggest that open dialogue between both parties is essential to a hope fostering relationship.

Finally, the findings of this study, regarding genuine relationships are parallel to the work of Talseth and colleagues (2001), who argue that a component of hope-fostering relationships include, " acknowledging and noticing another human being while engaging in dialogue, i.e., being aware of the needs of the other" (p. 253). The findings of their study highlight several hope-fostering aspects of relationships. Included in those factors is meaningful dialogue, that is, the ability of the professional to engage or *connect* with another in a genuine way. Furthermore, trust is viewed as essential as it helps to facilitate open and honest dialogue, including conversation related to vulnerabilities.

In summary, the findings of this study and those of previous researchers suggest that such positive features as trust, partnership, safety, genuineness, caring, and open and honest dialogue characterize hope-fostering relationships. These hope-fostering qualities can be found within various relationships, including relationships that students have with peers, family members, professors, and supervisors. Given the key role of the supervisory relationship, it has been the focus of this section. Previous researchers have examined hope-fostering elements within professional relationships, relationships in which there is an inherent power differential (e.g., doctor-patient). The findings of this study and those of previous researchers suggest that even within the professional parameters of a supervisory relationship one can foster hope – should one choose to do so. Rather than ignore hope, supervisors can choose to be deliberate and intentional about fostering hope, and the findings of this study provide suggestions on how to do so.

Responsiveness

While writing the findings chapter of my dissertation, I had two profoundly different experiences. In comparison to the hope-fostering component of the findings section, writing the hope-threatening segment of the findings was difficult. While writing the hope-fostering aspects of my participants' experiences I was energized. It was not difficult to remain focused on my writing. I moved with relative ease through this section of the document. Conversely, I found all aspects of producing and writing about the hope-threatening findings emotionally difficult. I noticed that while writing this section of the document my energy and interest waned. It was during this time that my own hope was threatened. Every day I thought about, or perhaps more accurately, obsessed over the need to continue writing this section. Although I was motivated to work on and write all others sections of the document, I did not want to write this section. I did everything I could to avoid exploring hope-threatening moments of my participants' experiences. I focused on writing or editing other sections of my document. I procrastinated by taking days off from writing. Perhaps it is because the topic was too close to home after all, I was attempting to write *my* dissertation while focusing on others negative experiences while writing their own. My level of hope was negatively impacted, not by interactions with others, but by focusing on the hope-threatening moments that my participants encountered. This emotional experience was captured in an email that I sent to my supervisor on April 29, 2005 during a time where I was in the midst of writing this difficult section. What follows is that email:

> *"Hi, Me again. I just wanted to let you know that I haven't finished the last section of my results yet – I am about 70% done the hope-threatening themes. I know what to write about but for some reason I am unmotivated to continue to work on them right now – or at least, unmotivated to work on that section for any*

length of time. Maybe it's because they are kind of a downer! Humm... anyhow – that's why you haven't received a draft of that part yet.

Instead, I have started to write parts of my discussion section. I have finished writing up the limits to the current study, direction for future research, recommendation sections – or at least a draft of these sections. I'm also trying to figure out how to best summarize my research and compare it to work that has been done in the past, yada yada yada.

In the very near future I anticipate sending some stuff your way – to review when you get a chance. I just thought I would tell you what I'm doing – in part to ensure that I stay on task. I've had a few low energy days lately – if I tell you what I'm doing and/or going to do then I have to do it. Make sense? That's it for now,

Have a great weekend,

Shelly

I have included this personal experience as part of my discussion section as an additional aspect of my research experience and exploration of the importance of hope in the dissertation process. Stated differently, during this time, I became intimately acquainted with the potentially paralysing impact of hope-threatening moments while writing a dissertation. Furthermore, my experience also suggests that hope and hopelessness can be contagious. When I focused on hope, I felt more hopeful. When I focused on moments that reduced hope, my hope was threatened.

To put this hope-threatening experience in the context of my dissertation topic, it was my supervisor who helped to engender hope during this difficult time, and therefore she helped to move me beyond this negative experience. Her ability to engender hope was perhaps subtle, although it had a powerful impact on me. Her response to this email, and others, was immediate. She acknowledged my experience. She understood hope and understood how, in her words, "*threats to hope can sort of rub off*". She encouraged me to do what I needed to do to move beyond this experience, even if that meant taking time

away from writing the difficult section. She conveyed a message of confidence in me. Although she could not change the experience for me in practical ways, I felt supported by her because she understood my experience and helped to normalize it for me. I have included, with her permission, an excerpt of her email response to me, dated May 3, 2005.

> *You're sounding tired. Like near the end of a marathon when the finish line is in sight but it's hard to believe that you'll make it. I'm not sure what you might like from me. I am wondering if you need a little breather from all this writing? You have been pushing very hard. I believe in you. I want to see you pull this together efficiently but sometimes a brain break is just what's needed... maybe it's a bit like letting the body get a good night's sleep after a long day? I remember stopping in the middle of my dissertation writing (just when everything needed to be in full swing) to read for a whole day and half what proved to be a really good novel – then took the next half day off to just soak in the glory of the story (how decadent and utterly unproductive). Somehow this did far more for me than the 2 or 3 pages that I would have managed to hammer out at that point. Crazy question but ... if you could follow your nose for a day, what would it have you doing?*

The dissertation is a long process, and others, including supervisors, cannot always prevent hope-threatening moments from occurring – that would be an unrealistic expectation. My experience and those of my participants provide clues as to how others can foster hope, even when they cannot do anything to practically change the negative situation. In my results sections, I spend a considerable amount of time writing about hope generating aspects of being responsive to and attending to the emotional needs of students. Students will have relationships with important others who play different roles in their lives, and because of this, how one attends to the emotional needs of students will be different depending on the type of relationship. For example, a relationship with a peer will likely be different than a relationship with a supervisor. In conversations with a peer, a student will likely feel more comfortable venting frustrations about supervisors or

departmental politics, an experience that would likely be validated by a peer, and not likely be shared by the student with his or her supervisor.

A student's relationship with his or her supervisor is different than the kind of relationship that he or she has with a peer. Attending to the emotional needs of students, especially within the context of a professional relationship, like one with a supervisor or other member of an academic department, does not imply that a "therapeutic" relationship exists between student and professor. Professional boundaries should be maintained. The supervisor is not a student's pseudo-therapist. I believe that it is beyond the scope of the supervisor's responsibilities to help the student "resolve" emotional issues. I am not suggesting that supervisors are responsible for the overall emotional well-being of the student, but it seems that they have a responsibility to acknowledge that a student's emotional or psychological well-being does impact the writing process. Participants in this study describe how detrimental it is to both the process and the relationship when supervisors do not acknowledge their difficulties or struggles.

The email exchange that I have included in the discussion section is a concrete example of how my supervisor attended to my emotional needs. The participants in this study describe similar hope-fostering experiences. To convey the message of understanding fosters hope. To normalize the experiences of students fosters hope. To encourage and allow students to respond to the hope-threatening situation in the way that they believe is most helpful fosters hope. To acknowledge struggles and to express interest in the "whole" student conveys a message of caring and hope. Although these responses may appear small, they are critical to fostering hope for the student. These responses from supportive others, especially supervisors, can help facilitate the

dissertation process by allowing the student to move beyond hope-threatening moments and thus re-focus on the dissertation process.

Previous research findings are consistent with the belief that attending to emotion (e.g., conveying a message of understanding) is key to fostering hope in another. For example, Wong-Wylie and Jevne (1997) found that doctor-patient hope-fostering relationships include those relationships in which patients feel as though their concerns are truly *heard* by their doctors (p. 43). Similarly, Cutcliffe and Baker (2002) assert that engagement is a means to inspire hope and suggest that engagement consists of several processes including "forming a relationship (a human-human connection), conveying acceptance and tolerance, and *hearing and understanding* [sic]" (p. 616). Finally, Talseth and colleagues (2001) argue that one component of fostering hope includes, "being seen as human" which involves "being heard", "being understood", and "being acknowledged in a non-judgemental way" (pp. 253-254).

In summary, the results of this study and the work of previous hope researchers suggest that awareness of and attending to the emotional needs of another helps to facilitate hope. Although supervisors play a key role in this process, so too do important others, especially individuals who are working on or have completed a dissertation. These people are in a position to validate and normalize a student's experience. Having an experience normalized helps to enhance feelings of connectedness and hope.

Recommendations Arising from the Study

I will now explore the recommendations that arise from the findings of this study. I believe that hope in the dissertation process is a shared responsibility and therefore, I outline suggestions for the student, the supervisor, and university departments. I provide

what I understand may be essential ingredients to fostering hope in doctoral students. Fostering hope may ease completion of the dissertation, or if not easing completion, at least help to create a more positive experience of learning and professional growth for the student throughout the process.

Recommendations for the Student

Several recommendations for students have been developed as a result of the findings of this study. It is my assertion that students can help to create opportunities for hope. I am not suggesting that students can always shelter themselves from experiences that threaten hope. Instead, I am suggesting that they can take some control over their own hoping process, which may serve to both help nurture hope and to minimize the impact of any hope-threatening experiences they may encounter. The findings of the study offer several ways that the student can take ownership of this process.

The first recommendation is that students endeavour to find individuals who share their interests, rather than attempting to conduct research in isolation. If the university department does not create meaningful opportunities that bring like-minded individuals together, then students are encouraged to create it for themselves. The findings of this study show that having an opportunity to talk about one's research with peers is beneficial on many levels - not the least of which is nurturing hope. Participants who talked to others about their research report having experienced greater enjoyment in the process, increased motivation, interest and energy, and enhanced ability to remain forward focused and goal directed. Because of these hope-fostering benefits associated with sharing the research process with someone, I suggest that students find research partners early on in the research process.

Similarly, students are encouraged to find and maintain a network of supportive individuals on whom they can rely on for emotional support and encouragement. Some students may also wish to become a member of a formal support group for graduate students. These groups are available at some universities through their student counselling programs (e.g., University of Alberta Student Counselling Services). The findings of this study suggest that hope is fostered when one feels a sense of connectedness to another, and that sharing experiences with fellow students fosters a feeling of connectedness between students. Students benefit from having their experiences validated and normalized by others; there is a decrease in feelings of isolation and alienation, and an apparent increased tolerance for negative experiences and ambiguity. Students should not be afraid to show vulnerability and talk about their emotional reaction to the doctoral program – students may feel affirmed to learn that others feel the same way too.

Finally, the findings suggest that students should work toward an awareness of their own learning style and needs with respect to how to facilitate the completion of the dissertation. In addition to this awareness, it is imperative that students articulate these needs clearly to others. Students should ask for what they need – this is their responsibility. Asking for what they need also opens up the possibility for dialogue. When it comes to the supervisory relationship, supervisors are often working with multiple students at any given time. Because each student is unique, it is unrealistic to assume that supervisors will automatically know exactly what will be helpful or supportive for each student. Although students cannot control the responses that they receive from their supervisor (i.e., whether he or she will be able to meet the request), I

believe that it is important that each student help to inform his or her supervisor about what is needed in order to facilitate the dissertation process.

Recommendations for the Supervisor

The findings suggest that supervisors should work towards being responsive to each student's individual needs. In order to do this effectively, supervisors are encouraged to create opportunities for collaborative discussions that allow students to voice their needs. The findings indicate that students feel respected when their supervisors treat them as competent and capable individuals. Furthermore, fostering a collaborative working relationship helps to both honour the students' abilities as well as enhance feelings of mutual respect. Does the student want the supervisor to edit the work or take a "hands-off" approach? Does the student need to meet weekly or bi-weekly or on an "as-needed" basis? Does the student need to brainstorm ideas or get down to the business of writing? Does the student need to be permitted to be creative in his or her approach to the work or does the approach need to be more systematic and structured? In addition to listening to the needs of students, supervisors are encouraged to meet these needs when possible, and if not possible, to be honest about why and help generate alternative solutions. It appears that clear communication nurtures relationships and fosters hope.

The findings suggest that a strong supervisory relationship can mitigate the hope-threatening aspects of a negative departmental environment; as such supervisors are encouraged to work towards building a strong relationship with their students. According to the findings of this study, strong relationships are developed when supervisors are viewed as willing to invest time and energy in their doctoral students. Relationships are

enhanced when supervisors are seen as individuals who empower students rather than overpower them – as individuals who encourage students' ideas and help to foster meaning in and ownership of their work. Students are likely to respond positively when supervisors demonstrate a genuine interest in their well-being and/or in the project. Similarly, strong relationships are developed when supervisors are viewed as willing to make themselves available to the student, are consistent in their interactions with and/or feedback to the students, and follow through on their commitments to the students. Finally, when appropriate, advocating for and protecting students from larger departmental issues (e.g., conflict between staff members) is viewed as a manifestation of a good working relationship. Students who believe that their supervisors have their best interest at heart and are working on their behalf are more likely to trust and respect their supervisors. Mutual trust and respect are, I believe, the foundation of any hope-fostering supervisory relationship. Students who trust and respect their supervisor will not only seek their guidance or counsel but will also accept it when offered.

Finally, supervisors are encouraged to convey a message of hope. Research findings suggest that in order to engender hope *in* another, one must first possess hope *for* the person (Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Edey & Jevne 2003; Manrique, 1984; Russinova, 1999). Although this earlier research addressed hope within the context of a counselling or therapeutic relationship, the findings of the current study are consistent with these earlier findings, suggesting that the same principles apply within the context of a supervisory relationship. Participants in this study talk about how their hope was enhanced when supervisors conveyed a message of confidence in them, that is, an unwavering belief that they would be successful in their endeavours. Students borrow

their supervisors' hopes *for* them, and use this hope to bolster or enhance their belief or hope for themselves. I would encourage supervisors to use each interaction as an opportunity to convey hope. Supervisors are encouraged to work from a place of hope, that is, to assume that those who have been accepted into the doctoral program department are competent academics - individuals that with the appropriate support and guidance are quite able to complete a dissertation. Supervisors are challenged by these research findings to genuinely examine their hope for the student and determine its impact upon interactions. There will likely be times throughout the process where the student questions his or her ability to complete the dissertation and it is during these difficult times that a supervisor's hope *for* him or her may help to carry the student through.

Recommendations for University Departments

Throughout the interviews, participants commented on their experiences or observations as they related to the departmental atmosphere. Unfortunately, most participants' comments were not flattering, and at times, the comments were highly critical. Many participants spoke of the apparent lack of community or connectedness within academic departments. This finding is consistent with the recent work of Larsen, Edey and LeMay (under review). In particular, Larsen et al. interviewed faculty members from university departments, and they, too, consistently described a hope-threatening lack of community in their respective university departments. As I offer the following suggestion, I recognize that these recommendations are already in place in some university departments. University departments that are already implementing these hope-fostering strategies are encouraged to continue to do so.

Previous research suggests that hope exists within the context of relationship or community - in an atmosphere of connectedness. According to Dufault and Martocchio (1985) hope has an "affiliative dimension" which can be manifested through one's relationship with people (p. 386). Similarly, Farran et al. (1995) note that hope is a "relational process" - "something that occurs between persons". As suggested by the findings of this research, the academic environment is not an atmosphere that serves to foster hope in students. University department administrators are therefore encouraged to be mindful of the type of environment that they help to create. Departments that do not already do so are encouraged to attempt to foster a sense of connectedness and community among its staff and students. In an effort to minimize alienation and isolation, meaningful opportunities for students and staff to come together should be encouraged within the department. Research or support groups could be created and maintained in an effort to provide students with the opportunity to discuss research ideas and/or shared experiences or frustrations. These groups could be peer or faculty driven. When possible, research teams can be created so that students with similar interests can help one another achieve their shared goal. Research teams could encourage cooperation and collaboration among students, rather than competition, which may be seen as a hindrance to feelings of community and connectedness. Research teams could serve to both ease the burden of the dissertation, by sharing the responsibility with others, as well as enhance feelings of community or connectedness among students. Meaningful opportunities to vent frustrations as well as discuss research have been described by participants as helpful to fostering hope. Similarly, sharing hope threats in a real community appears to help dissipate them. A department that deliberately attends to these needs by fostering a sense

of community may therefore also be creating an atmosphere for students where hope can exist.

The second departmental suggestion that I propose does not come directly from the findings of this study, rather, it is derived from my experiences or reflections as an interviewer, as well as comments that I received from some of the participants. It was my experience that the PhDs I interviewed for this study were highly articulate, reflective, and insightful individuals who had a wealth of information to pass on to me about their doctoral school experiences. Some participants describe never having been given the opportunity to reflect upon their doctoral school experiences in a formal or structured way and that they found the interview experience to be enjoyable and for some, even therapeutic or helpful. Furthermore, the information that they provided to me shed light on several aspects, both positive and negative, associated with their experiences in a doctoral program. It is my suggestion that university departments capitalize on this valuable resource in an effort to improve upon their current departmental structure or environment. University departments that do not already do so may wish to formalize the process by developing a type of "exit-interview" or an anonymous questionnaire to be given to all students who complete or withdraw from their program. Former students, rather than current students, may feel less vulnerable and thus more likely to share honest information about their experiences. To further encourage honest dialogue, university departments may wish to employ someone who has no affiliation with the department to gather this information. University departments that are receptive to this information may learn about what works and does not work in their current department, and this information can then be used to help improve their department or program.

Limitations of the Study

Participants in this study were those who successfully completed their doctoral degree, rather than individuals who were currently enrolled in a doctoral program. This decision arose because of the belief that graduates of doctoral programs would feel less vulnerable to potential repercussions and therefore more willing to freely discuss all aspects, including negative aspects, of their interactions with others. Furthermore, participants in this study, unlike students who are currently enrolled in a doctoral program, also had the benefit of hindsight. They all had an opportunity to reflect upon their overall doctoral school experiences, as well as, they may have had additional experiences as graduates which served to shape or influence the meaning of these hope-impacting interactions. The information gathered from graduates of doctoral programs, although similar, may not be entirely reflective of the experiences of on-going students.

A second limitation of this study is the inclusion of only successful doctoral graduates rather than individuals who have chosen to withdraw from a doctoral program. As argued by Snyder and colleagues, "high hope" individuals are more successful academically (Curry et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002) and are more likely to complete their academic programs (Snyder, Shorey et al., 2002). Further, interactions are said to impact levels of hope (Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Eliott & Olver, 2002; Haase et al., 1992; Jevne et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Rabkin et al., 1999; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). The aforementioned research suggests that the hope-influencing relationships of "completers" and "non-completers" may be different. Indeed those who choose not to complete their program may be a distinct subset of the doctoral student population. Specifically, these

individuals may possess a lower level of hope and/or encounter a greater number of hope-threatening interactions with others that interfere with their progress along their academic goals. Those who choose to withdraw from a doctoral program may have experiences that focus to a great extent on hope-threatening interactions. Although such a focus could also be insightful and provide valuable information, it is important to set practical limits with respect to inclusion in this study. In addition, I decided to take a positive psychological perspective consistent with hope – that is, what is the experience of those for whom the dissertation process "worked".

Finally, I decided to limit inclusion in the study to graduates of applied doctoral programs. I did so because of several factors. First, researchers argue that the graduate school and dissertation experience differs between disciplines (Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Nerad & Cerny, 1993). Furthermore, Elgar (2003) highlights that completion rates vary greatly between disciplines, that some disciplines have a greater proportion of "non-completers". I chose to limit inclusion rather than attempt to represent all, or many, fields. Furthermore, a broadened scope to the study would have begged for some exploration of the potentially unique aspects and/or experiences associated with each discipline, making the study unmanageable. I chose to narrow the exploration to those in an applied setting for several reasons. For example, participants in applied programs, when compared to other fields of study, may differ with respect to age and motivation for entering a doctoral program. For example, individuals in applied doctoral programs may be older and motivated to enter the programs in order to meet the minimum requirements for a particular career. Furthermore, these are often career fields where relationship and interpersonal skills are explicitly considered important. Finally, this decision was also

partly based on pragmatic considerations, specifically, the belief that finding participants who would be willing to participate in this study would be facilitated if they came from applied fields with which I have more contact, rather than attempting to secure participants without having any contact persons to facilitate the process. Given this limitation, the information gathered from graduates of applied doctoral programs may not be reflective of the experience of students who receive degrees in other fields (e.g., pure sciences).

Finally no attempts were made to use recruitment techniques designed to capture hope in the dissertation process from a multi-cultural perspective and coincidentally, all participants in this study were Caucasian. Given this relatively homogeneous sample, the findings of this may therefore not be reflective of the experiences of individuals from varying cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Direction for Future Research

This study can be considered one of the first in a series of studies that can be conducted to examine hope within the context of the doctoral school experience. As the aforementioned limitations suggest future research in the area can be expanded to include a multicultural perspective, individuals from various disciplines, students who are actively involved in doctoral studies, as well as those who choose to withdraw from doctoral programs. Future studies in these areas would broaden the scope of the exploration, allowing for an examination of the potential similarities and differences across multiple experiences.

The current study had a particular objective, that is, to examine hope-impacting interactions with others. This study did not explore or address other experiences that

doctoral students may have that impact hope in the dissertation process. As suggested by some participants, illnesses, geographical separation from supportive persons (i.e., partners and family), and length of time it takes to complete the dissertation, all play a role with respect to hope in the dissertation process. It may be interesting to explore in greater detail how these, and other factors impacted the doctoral students level of hope, and thus, impacted the dissertation process.

This study examined hope from the perspective of doctoral students, and it was the students' interpretation of supervisor behaviour or intent that was often the focus of exploration. In addition to exploring hope from the perspective of the student, it may be interesting to conduct a similar study from the perspective of the supervisor, that is, to explore hope-impacting experiences that supervisors have with others. Supervisors are often in a position to juggle departmental responsibilities with supervisory responsibilities, and at times, these multiple responsibilities may place difficult time pressures on the supervisor. On one hand, supervisors must juggle departmental pressures to have their students complete in a timely fashion. On the other hand, supervisors also work to provide struggling students with sufficient support and flexibility to facilitate completion. Future studies could examine how the departmental environment impacts supervisors' hope; similarly, one could consider researching how to support the supervisors' hope when they are challenged by students' difficulties.

Results of this study suggest that there is a delicate balance between providing feedback in an effort to help a student learn and develop as an academic versus taking over the research project and effectively forcing the student to surrender to the will of the supervisor. This study examined only one side of the supervisor-student relationship.

Reaching an appropriate balance with respect to feedback versus talking control, I am sure, is only one of many important struggles that supervisors face regularly throughout the course of their work as academics. Future research could examine the challenges faced by professors who are tasked with the responsibility of supervising doctoral students. It would be interesting and potentially of practical use, to examine whether the struggles of supervisors are consistent with or parallel to those of the students they are asked to support.

One could also approach the exploration of hope-impacting interactions by interviewing supervisor-student pairs. By interviewing both members of the supervisory relationship, one could gather information from both perspectives simultaneously. For example, one could explore the ways in which supervisors attempt to engender hope through their interactions with students, and then follow-up with students to inquire as to whether their hope was impacted within the context of that interaction. Upon the conclusion of each supervisory meeting, supervisors and students could reflect upon hope-impacting moments that occurred in that meeting.

Researchers suggest that a component of hope is thinking about the future, establishing goals for oneself, and working to achieve those goals (Benzein et al., 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1995; Farran et al., 1995; Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000; Snyder, Feldoman et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). The current research study suggests that nurturing students' hope will help them to realize their academic or educational goals. Students spend several years dedicated to their academic or professional goals – *hoping* to get a doctoral degree. What happens to the hoping person once he or she has reached his or her goals? I have had several conversations with recent graduates of doctoral

programs who describe this time as a period of transition, a time where they reflect upon their achievements and work to establish new goals for themselves. This time of transition, from what I understand, can be difficult for former students. It may be interesting to examine this time of transition more closely and through the lens of hope. By interviewing recent graduates one could learn more about the impact of reaching one's goals after dedicating several years of working to achieve it and the process of developing new goals.

Research has shown that graduate school can negatively impact marriages, and that graduate students are at a higher risk for divorce (Scheinkman, 1988). Although their involvement in a doctoral program did not result in failed relationships, some participants did talk about how their doctoral studies, especially the dissertation, impacted their home life and partners. Participants commented on how the emotional difficulties and struggles that they encountered influenced their interactions with their partners. It may be interesting to examine the doctoral school experience from the partners' perspectives. The decision to enter a doctoral program, especially if one is in a committed relationship, is often a joint decision. Conducting a study that examines the partner's experience may provide additional information that could be used when a family or couple is making a decision about whether one person should pursue a doctoral degree.

Conclusion

This study was proposed as an exploration of the hope-impacting interactions that doctoral students have with others during the dissertation process. The findings of this study suggest that for the participants in this study, hope played an important role in the dissertation process. For those who experienced difficulties, hope helped them to

overcome these experiences. For others, who had little or no struggles throughout the process, hope was viewed as a type of protective element that shielded them from difficulties. Furthermore, the findings support the belief that doctoral students' hope is nurtured within the context of their relationships with others. Peers, family, and friends all had a role in fostering hope in the student; however, the supervisory relationship was viewed as a key relationship for the student. In an academic department that was commonly described by participants as a threat to hope, the supervisory relationship appeared to mitigate its impact. Those participants who had a strong and supportive supervisor appeared to be less affected by the hope-threatening aspects of the academic environment. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that attending to and nurturing hope in the doctoral student facilitates the dissertation process.

Elgar (2000) noted that universities have a responsibility to find cost-effective ways to support students to completion, and that attending to the emotional needs of students is a key way to demonstrate support because emotional support is viewed as an essential ingredient for academic success. Given the findings of this study, it appears that one important way to support the doctoral student is to nurture and foster hope in any and all interactions.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Orientation Instructions

Who am I?
My name is Shelly Bernard. I'm a doctoral student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta. I'm conducting my doctoral dissertation research, under the supervision of Dr. Denise Larsen.

What is my research question?
I am conducting a qualitative research study on the topic of hope. The research in the area of hope tells us that interactions with others can influence hope, either positively or negatively. Sometimes, when we talk or meet with others we leave feeling more hopeful. We are full of energy. We are inspired. Sometimes, unfortunately, we leave feeling like our hope has left us. It is this very experience that I want to study. I want to explore the question, **"What is the influence of interpersonal interactions on the hope of doctoral students who are in the process of writing their doctoral dissertation?"** The aim of the study is to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-inducing" and/or "hope-reducing" interactions that doctoral students have with others.

You can make a difference
Having successfully completed a doctoral program, you are in a key position to reflect upon and speak about influential encounters with others. Although your doctoral program had several requirements, I am interested in the hope-reducing or hope-enhancing interactions that you had during the time that you were working on your doctoral dissertation. I want to better understand how interactions with others helped you feel more "hope-full" or more "hope-less". It is really up to you what stories you share with me, but I would like you to talk about, in as much detail as you can, 1-5 specific examples of when your hope was affected by another. For example, you may wish to talk about a specific conversation or confrontation with a peer, a family member, your advisor, or members of your advisory committee, etc. Or you may wish to speak of a time in which no words were spoken, but the time spent with someone was powerful, so powerful that it influenced your hope.

If you are interested
If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to meet with me three times. The first time we meet I will ask you complete a brief questionnaire, designed to capture specific demographic information. At this time, I will also ask you to participate in an exercise designed to help you recall details of these salient "hope-inducing" or "hope-reducing"

interactions, and to provide a narrative of these experiences to me either orally or in writing. Upon completion of this exercise, we will set a time to meet again. This second meeting will consist of a 60-120 minute interview. In the interim, I will have developed several interview questions based on the incidents you had previously described to me.

After I have completed analysing the interview data, I will provide you with an opportunity to review my work. We will meet one final time, and at this point, I would like for you to tell me whether I've captured your experience.

Issues of anonymity
Your identity will be protected. For example, together we will come up with a pseudonym or name that you would like me to use in my study. From that point on, any reference that I make about you specifically will only include this false name. If, by including specific demographic information that could be used to identify you, I will not include this information. Further, with respect to the interview data, the identity of any individual you name will also be protected with the use of pseudonyms.

What if you change your mind?
Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you will not be financially compensated for your participation. As such, you can change your mind at any time and without consequence to you. If you change your mind you just need to tell my research advisor or me. No one will pressure you to continue, and there will be no consequences associated with deciding that you don't want to participate. If after we meet the first time, you decide that you don't feel comfortable with the information that you've shared with me, you can change your mind and tell me to not include this information in my study. Again, no one will pressure you and there will be no consequences associated with changing your mind.

As you know, my research study is part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at the University of Alberta. Once the study has been finished and approved by the University, you will no longer be able to withdraw your participation. So, if your wish is to withdraw please do so prior to the completion of the study.

What happens to the information?
All of the information that you, and others, share with me will be summarized into themes included in my final report or dissertation, future publications, and/or workshops and conferences. To get to the final product, I will need to complete a variety of steps. The first step is the one that I want to bring to your attention, because it involves audio-recording

the interview. I need to audio-record this meeting so that I can transcribe it verbatim, and work from the written text rather than the audio-recordings. In any event, all of the "raw" information (e.g., questionnaires, audio-tapes, electronic and "hard-copies" of the transcripts, my written observations throughout the interview) will be kept under lock and key. Only my research supervisor, myself, and perhaps my research supervisory committee will have access to this material. This material will be destroyed once I have completed and defended my dissertation.

What if you have questions?
If, after we have gone through this introduction, you have questions or concerns please feel free to discuss them with me now. Also, you are free to ask any questions at any point in time throughout your involvement in the study. I've given you my telephone number and e-mail address, so please do not hesitate to contact me. You are also free to talk with my supervisor, Dr. Denise Larsen.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated! Your contribution to my study is invaluable. You are in a key position to help us learn how to nurture and foster hope. I look forward to the opportunity to learn from your experience.

Sincerely,

Shelly Bernard, M.Ed.
Phone: (780) 432-3054
Email: sbernard@ualberta.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780) 492-3751.

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate Form

Agreement to participate in the study
"The Impact of Hope in the Dissertation Process: Perceptions of Doctoral Students"

RESEARCHER
Shelly Bernard, M.Ed.; (PhD Candidate)
Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
(780) 432-3054

SUPERVISOR
Denise Larsen, PhD
Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
(780) 492-5897

Purpose of the study: This study will attempt to explore the question, "What is the influence of interpersonal interactions on the hope of doctoral students who are in the process of writing their doctoral dissertation?" That is, this study will aim to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-inducing" and/or "hope-reducing" interactions of doctoral students who are working to complete their dissertation.

I, _____, consent to participate in the doctoral dissertation "The Impact of Hope in the Dissertation Process: Perceptions of Doctoral Students". This study has been explained to me and I understand the following:

- My involvement in the study is voluntary

- I will meet with the researcher three times. I will complete a brief questionnaire designed to capture demographic information, a recollection exercise, and a 60-120 minute interview. I understand that this interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once she has completed analyzing her data, the researcher will contact me to arrange a time for us to meet again. During this meeting, I will review and comment upon her work - reflecting upon whether the themes generated accurately reflects my experience.

- I understand that the information I share for the purpose of this study will be held confidential. Only the researcher, her dissertation supervisor, and if necessary, her supervisory committee, will have access to the audio-recordings, transcribed material, and questionnaire information. While needed, all information about me (i.e., interview recordings, transcription, recorded observations, questionnaire information) will be properly stored (e.g., locked cabinet).

- In keeping with the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics standards, audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews, questionnaire information, and recorded observations about me will be kept for five years after the study has been completed and approved by the University of Alberta. After five years, all information will be properly destroyed.

- I understand that my identity and the identity of others I name in the interview will be protected by the use of a pseudonym and identifying information will not be used in this report.

- I understand that because my participation in this study is voluntary, I can refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and without pressure from the researcher and/or her supervisor. To withdraw, I need only inform the researcher or her supervisor, Dr. Denise Larsen, of my intent. Should I wish to withdraw, I must do so prior to the completion of the final document. Once the research document has been finalized and granted approval by the University of Alberta, I can no longer withdraw from the study.

- I understand that the information collected for this study will be used for the purpose of the present dissertation, as well as future presentations and/or publications of the results. By signing this consent form, I am also granting permission to use the information that I provided in any future presentations and/or publications.

- I understand that I have the right to request and receive a report outlining the results of this study. I need only ask the researcher should I wish such information.

- I understand that I have the right to contact the researcher or her supervisor, Dr. Denise Larsen, if I have any questions or concerns related to my participation in this study.

- I understand that discussing my previous interactions with others may be difficult for me and I may become emotionally distressed or distraught. Should such a situation arise, I understand that I will be given the opportunity to end the formal interview and discuss these issues with the researcher. As well, should I wish further psychological assistance, the researcher will review available options with me.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780) 492-3751.

APENDIX C

Demographic Information Questionnaire

1. Pseudonym:
2. Age:
3. Marital (Relationship) Status:
4. Where (i.e., what university) did you obtain your PhD?
5. What is your area of speciality?
6. How many years did it take for you to obtain your degree?
7. Did you take any years off during this degree? If yes, why?
8. What sources of funding did you have throughout your doctoral program?

APPENDIX D

Interview Material

Instructions:

"The purpose of this study is to look at the different types of encounters that you have had while working on your doctoral dissertation. These encounters or interactions may have happened at any time during your dissertation experience from design to writing or defending your final draft. These interactions may have been with your advisor, your partner, your peers, etc. The salient aspect of these interactions is that they had a **significant impact** on your hope, either leaving you feeling more hope-full or more hope-less. What I would like for you to describe to me is the exact details of these specific encounters as you remember them. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the dynamics of the "hope-inducing" and/or "hope-reducing" interactions, as experienced by doctoral students who are working to meet the requirements of their doctoral program. It is really up to you what interactions you choose to share with me, with one exception, that is, the interactions should have had a **considerable impact** on your hope."

Interview Guide

Initial Questions:

- What were you hoping for when you entered the PhD program?
- When were your expectations regarding support that you hoped to receive when you entered the program?
- When you started the dissertation, what did you envision the outcome to be? Has it met your expectation?
- When you started your dissertation, what did you envision the process to be? Has it met your expectation?

Potential Follow-up Questions re: Critical Incident

- Describe your relationship with that person?
- How long did you know them?
- What was said?
- What were your expectations?
- How long would you say that this moment impacted you?
- What were your feelings/emotions associated with this experience?
- Any external factors going on that impacted how this experience impacted you?
- How would you describe the characteristics of the person?
- Would you have liked the person to have done something different? If yes, what would that be?
- Is there anything that would have changed the interaction for you? If yes, what would that be?
- Anything else I need to know about this experience to better understand it?

Ending Questions:

- How did you come to choose these incidents?
- What did you learn about hope, if anything, from this interview?
- What has it been like to reflect upon your doctoral research experience through the lens of hope?
- How do you define hope?
  Anything else I need to know?

APPENDIX E

Fictitious Critical Incident

I remember my third year of my doctoral program, the year I started my internship. I had just finished my two residency (full time) years and had been spending a lot of time on campus. To be off campus for the first time was kind of an adjustment for me. In addition, because of several things that had been going on for these first two years, I had been feeling really disillusioned and disconnected from the department – kind of like, they were no longer concerned about my well-being – focusing instead on the new people entering into the program – I was forgotten. I just wanted to quit – say goodbye to school! Anyhow, I went upstairs to the mailbox area, and came to realize that my name wasn't listed anywhere – I didn't exist! Alone, this would have meant nothing – but on that day, when I was already feeling like I didn't exist – it meant everything and just reaffirmed what I was feeling inside. I went downstairs after and ran into my supervisor. She asked "how are you?" and I just started to cry. I explained what had just happened and how it felt to be forgotten by the department. She listened. She then proceeded to tell me a metaphor of this experience – how the doctoral program is like a marathon, and that, with only 2 miles left, I shouldn't stop running. In that moment, at that time, I needed to hear that despite everything, I could – I should "finish the race". At that moment, I knew that she trusted that I would finish and would be there to cheer me on as I crossed the finish line.

Step one:

- obtain "critical happenings" (event and associated meaning)
- quality indicators (positive = engender hope; negative = reduce hope)

Value	**Critical happening**	**Quality Indicator**
+	student is listened to by her supervisor (event), which she perceives as support (meaning)	engendering hope involves being listening to by supervisor
+	student is told metaphor (event) which she perceives as encouragement (meaning)	engendering hope involves getting encouragement from supervisor
-	administrators neglect including student on mailbox (event) which is perceived as "being forgotten" (meaning)	reducing hope involves being "forgotten" by administrators
-	student is "off-campus" for the first time (event) and as a result is feeling "isolated" (meaning)	reducing hope involves feeling geographically "isolated"

Step two:

- generate subcategories – by value and topic of quality indicator

Subcategories

Positive value

Engendering hope involves being listened to by supervisor

Engendering hope involves being offered encouragement by supervisor

Negative value

Reducing hope involves feeling geographically isolated

Reducing hope involves feeling forgotten by administrators

NOTE: For each of the "positive" and "negative" group I grouped the quality indicators into related topic areas. For example, if several quality indicators refer to a sense of geographic isolation, I would group all of these together to form a subcategory.

Step three:

- Group subcategories into categories

NOTE: I reduced the data further by grouping subcategories into categories. My earlier single case example will not suffice to illustrate the cluster process. Simply, consistent with the work of Redfern and Norman (1999a) I reduced the data further by grouping related subcategories into categories.

Step four:

- In their final step, Redfern and Norman (1999a) generated neutral themes - that is, they generated themes from the categories. Applied to this study, using this approach would, perhaps falsely, suggest that the positive and negative categories that have been developed address the same factors – that the factors that serve to reduce hope are just opposite to the ones that engender hope, and this would ignore the possibility that factors that serve to engender and reduce hope may be independent factors - having no influence are unrelated to one another.

For example, if one were to assume that within the negative (hope reducing) category, a final grouping indicates that "geographic distance" reduces hope. To neutralize this category would be to, perhaps falsely, suggest that geographic proximity enhances hope (where there has been no suggestion of this in the fictitious critical incident included above). Rather than create neutral themes – I generated themes from each of the positive and negative categories that have been generated.

Quality Indicators

Hope-engendering (positive)
- derived from critical happenings

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Hope Reducing (negative)
- derived from critical happenings

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Subcategories

Hope-engendering quality indicators
- grouped by topic

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Hope reducing quality indicators
- grouped by topic

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Categories

Hope-engendering subcategories
– grouped

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Hope reducing subcategories
- grouped

⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓ ⇓

Themes

Hope-engendering categories
- grouped

Hope reducing categories
- grouped